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RALPH WALDO EMERSON'S APPROACH TO GOD

by

Louis I. Tenzis, A.M.

This dissertation is submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
at Loyola University,  
Chicago, Illinois,  
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## INTRODUCTION

The ideals of the Revolution had still not settled into the mainstream of American life by 1830. Over two million black Americans were slaves. Burgeoning industry was sucking low-income farm-people into the cities and exploiting them. The best of the virgin lands were held by the banks and railroads. For a great number of the new Republic's first-born, meaningful freedom and equality had yet to be attained. Many among them were eager to transform America's institutions to fit the ideals of the democracy. Some of these young people, centering about Concord and Boston, accepted the title "Transcendentalist."

In its hoped-for reformation for society this group felt a special intellectual challenge from the elder scholars who scoffed at the possibility of ordinary persons establishing moral and religious truths for themselves. According to the older, and even ancient, tradition the directives of God's will indeed God's very existence could be reliably ascertained only by a specially educated elite, trained to interpret Scriptures and to think correctly.

Those of the Transcendentalist temper disagreed. Since nature was the expression of God's will, the more freely one could attend to one's nature the more sure his moral judgments; moreover since nature was accessible to all, God's will must

be open to all. The Transcendentalists set about to articulate a new approach to judging reality, one in which the discovery of God's will--and indeed God's existence--would be accessible to everyone. Orestes Brownson, Theodore Parker and others tried to formulate this approach. And however their formulations varied they all agreed implicitly that it was crucial this new approach should be able to confirm God's existence. For just as their elders, the Transcendentalists (and many of their associates) had willingly inherited the Puritan belief that moral precepts derived their authority as expressions of God's will. To deny God's existence would destroy the binding force of moral law and hence completely deflate their hopes for mass institutional reform.

Ralph Waldo Emerson also attempted to articulate the new metaphysical viewpoint, and from it to develop a broadly accessible approach to God's existence that might serve to ground a morals befitting the New Democracy. This study concerns his treatment of the question of God's existence. Three propositions serve as major focal-points. First, Emerson's thought is genuinely and creatively philosophical. Second, his philosophical procedure arises within the ordinary experience of living and may be called an incipient pragmatism. Third, following this procedure Emerson concluded that the evidences for belief arising in ordinary experience show that God exists.

Disappointment with the teachings of traditional Christianity led him into the path of philosophy. His earliest concern

had been to find suitable norms for moral perfection within traditional Christianity but he concluded that since Christianity supposed nature was corrupt its claims regarding moral behavior and reality in general, including God's existence, were worthless. From revelation he turned to reason. Traditional empiricism and idealism seemed serious efforts at developing a viable approach to nature but he decided both fell short because they too began with myopic assumptions about nature. To find answers at all he would have to work out his own approach to philosophy. Only then could he argue to God's existence and ground his moral theory. Chapter I and II trace his critique of traditional Christianity and philosophy to this conclusion.

His new approach was total reliance on the ordinary experience of natural living. It had two phases, simplicity and spontaneity. The first attempts to relieve man from cultural preconceptions which hinder total reliance on natural living. The second immerses man totally in the spontaneous directionalities of nature. Spontaneous living provides him with true beliefs about the world, and--important for his argument for God's existence--his norms for ascertaining whether his beliefs are true. The next two Chapters study simplicity and spontaneity, the phases of his philosophical procedure.

We should explain in passing that he is not a philosopher in the usual academic sense, for his is not a technical philosophy. His language is controlled but not literal. His thought

is logically disciplined but he makes little study of logic as a discipline--nor does he concern himself at any length with whether his reasoning fits into the accepted canons of logic. His philosophy is more akin to that of Dante, Goethe, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, and perhaps Sartre. He is nearer as he himself claims to the ancient Greek "lovers of wisdom", Socrates and Plato. For Emerson, the important issues pertain to human existence; they arise as genuine problems in actual human living or not at all. His concepts, his procedures, his modes of expression are entirely decided by that concern.

The last two Chapters deal specifically with his thinking on God's existence. He believed that his philosophical procedure (loosely designated as "the moral sentiment") established that God, the primal boundless source of creativity, existed. In brief, since belief in God arose within and was confirmed by ordinary experience according to the moral sentiment, then God must be real. Chapter V discusses the meaning he gives to the term God; Chapter VI turns to the argument itself.

## CHAPTER I

### EMERSON'S CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY

Emerson decided that natural intelligence alone, not a specially historically given Christian revelation, could properly ground moral and religious beliefs. He came to this conclusion during his efforts to discover an adequate standard for moral perfection within Christian revelation. This chapter deals with the stages of his thinking which led him to this decision.

In the earliest stage he sought the moral standard within the New England sects, Calvinism and Unitarianism. Unsatisfied, he then tried to locate it within some as yet undiscovered non-sectarian core of Christian revelation. This state had two phases. For a while he tried arguing that this core was a unique deposit given in history, but soon concluding it was far more pertinent to establish the existence of this unique revelation in the present, he abandoned the historical quest. During this second stage he attempted to turn the Unitarian arguments for the authenticity of Christian revelation to his own purposes. These arguments, from miracles and the moral sense, receive special attention in this chapter. It was through his efforts to use them to argue to the authentic core of Christian revelation that he came to the final stage of his critique: that if

moral and religious truths were to be discovered at all, only natural intelligence would find them.

### Early Influence of Calvinism and Unitarianism

Ralph Waldo Emerson entered Harvard College in 1817 perplexed. The scripture injunction "Be ye perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect," haunted him. Taken at its written worth it suggested a paradox--that imperfect man become like God. Yet how was it possible for imperfect mortals to reach divine perfection? The young man earnestly sought an answer. He believed God specially instituted Christianity to unravel the puzzle precisely by providing the standard which would bring the commanded perfection about. Hence his search began within the gates of Christianity or, more particularly, within the two religious traditions closest within the gates for him at the time: Calvinism and Unitarianism.

His life was subject to the early influences of both Calvinism and Unitarianism. He grew up an avowed Unitarian--born into the religion of his father, a minister, who, following the leadership of another Unitarian minister, Buckminster, placed New England Unitarianism on the path toward its eventual sophistication. Moreover, by the time Ralph Waldo went to Harvard the school was already firmly in the direction of Unitarian hands. In fact he never fully set aside his Unitarian associations.

Yet he was also steeped with lasting effect in Calvinism.

With his father's death, his formation from age eight shifted almost entirely into the care of his mother and his Aunt Mary, both devout Calvinists. His aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, deserves special comment. Quick, intelligent, slightly renegade in her religious beliefs, she tried earnestly to combine a strong sense of dedication to her own religious beliefs with a fair amount of open-mindedness toward the beliefs of other denominations. The true scope of her influence on the youth--though quite significant--has yet to be researched. She entered his life at many times. She became almost a second mother in the widow Emerson's struggling household and gained the rare distinction of being Ralph Waldo's intellectual confidant during his early manhood years.

Even his Unitarianism had its Calvinist traces. Originally New England Unitarianism grew out of the Calvinist congregations. Its nascent form seemed so consistent with the Calvinist teachings that its eventual burgeoning as a distinct point of view took many Calvinist theologians entirely by surprise. They accused its leaders of having planted sedition in the Calvinist ranks.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the split many Calvinist domains became Unitarian. Thus, for instance, Cotton Mather once pastored Emerson's father's pulpit--a fact which the younger Emerson regarded with reverence. Harvard College too was Calvinist before it turned Unitarian. Its library remained a storehouse

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Clarence Faust, "The Background of the Unitarian Opposition to Transcendentalism," Modern Philology, XXXV (1938), pp. 297, et seq.



of the older Puritan writings. Ralph Waldo would read them intently.

Initially the youth hoped to find an adequate moral standard within Calvinism and Unitarianism. But neither satisfied him. Both drew distorted pictures of nature, especially human nature. The Calvinist conception was too pessimistic; the Unitarian, too optimistic.

### Calvinist Conception of Nature

According to classical Calvinist theology man's nature, because of the primitive fall, is entirely depraved. Man can do nothing of himself either to achieve or thwart his salvation; salvation is entirely a gift of God. Christ justifies and sanctifies a particular fallen man's nature, if God's will has so predestined it. Justification means to be redeemed or saved; sanctification means to be purified from sin in one's day to day activities.<sup>2</sup>

The sign of justification is personal sanctification. Man must, therefore, attempt by his own efforts to make his every action holy--i.e., pleasing to God's will. Yet since all nature has become depraved with the fall of man's nature he cannot expect to discover God's will by looking to the things of nature

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. John Winthrop, "Journal," p. 53; John Cotton, "Christian Calling," pp. 172, et seq., in The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry, ed. by Perry Miller, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956). (Hereinafter referred to as American Puritans.)

(God's hidden will). To discover what course of action conforms to God's will he must turn with trust to God's revealed will, the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

Living by the Bible was not all that simple, since usually it was not immediately evident how a Scriptural passage should relate to a present course of action. Somehow, depraved though his nature was, the elect had to rely on his natural capacities to make the right interpretation of Scriptures. Puritans in the homeland came to recognize this amid the climate of rapid social change which marked Elizabethan and Restoration England.<sup>4</sup> The success of the colonists in forging a new community in the wilderness, where there was high demand to rely on one's own abilities, sparked a like realization among New England Puritans. In their efforts to cope with this complication Puritans polarized into two tendencies.

Following one move some Puritans, on the theory that upon justification reason becomes somewhat regenerated, inclined to direct their sanctification by a sober, conservative, rather rationally critical commitment to Revelation; following another move some leaned toward the belief that the Spirit dwelling within steers the elect to sanctification by their personal feelings of religious enthusiasm. John Cotton and Anne

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Increase Mather, "Man knows not his time," pp. 183, et sqq; Urian Oakes, "The Sovereign Efficacy of Divine Providence," pp. 192, et sqq., ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Alan Simpson, Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 13.

Hutchinson represent the polarity in the 1600's; Charles Chauncy and Johnathan Edwards reflect it in the 1700's.

Special Impact of Edwards on the Development  
of New England Calvinism

It is important to our purpose to remark upon the place of Johnathan Edwards in the development of New England Calvinist theology. Perry Miller maintains that American Transcendentalists were attempting to recapture the position of Edwardianism. Indeed some key Emersonian notions can be traced to Calvinist origins through Edwards.<sup>5</sup>

During the 18th century certain sectors of New England became rather well to do. With increased prosperity Puritan religiousness turned quite sedate and formalistic.<sup>6</sup> In the age before, the experience of conversion had been widely considered the chief sign of election, of salvation, and among Congregationalists, of church membership. This experience, usually attended by a feeling of high enthusiasm, indicated a new birth which brought with it the conviction of being saved and a dedication to doing battle with sin.<sup>7</sup> Now the earlier insistence on inward feelings of ecstasy and on moral seriousness had dwindled, so much so that frequently not even clerics considered it

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<sup>5</sup>Miller, "Johnathan Edwards to Emerson," New England Quarterly, XIII (December, 1940), p. 608.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 600.

<sup>7</sup>Simpson, Puritanism in Old and New England, pp. 2, et sqq.

necessary to experience conversion.<sup>8</sup>

It was Edwards who refurbished the foundations of Puritan philosophy and revived the waning seriousness of Puritan fervor and dedication. To rekindle religious experience, to call men's hearts to God, Edwards not without trepidation strongly reaffirmed the importance of sentiment--thus the vigorous tone of his sermons.

Yet he was not as distrustful as Calvin of rational thinking as a means to foster religious insight.

Edwards was a gifted speculative thinker whose mind was nourished by the great thinkers of the past, and freshened by the new currents flowing from the Cambridge Platonists, from Locke and from Berkeley.<sup>9</sup>

In effect Edwards attempted to synthesize both poles in the Puritan tradition by bringing both reason and emotion to bear together upon sound religious conviction. Emerson's notion of experience bears Edward's mark.

Edwards also mollified the Puritan concept of nature. Like Calvin he placed the sovereignty of God above all other considerations, yet within this framework several subordinate doctrines assumed a different tone. First, though depraved and fallen all nature was a product of God's will. Since His will was all-good all nature had to be good.<sup>10</sup> Secondly regarding means of sanctification, though men were saved only by putting

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<sup>8</sup>Ralph Barton Perry, Puritanism and Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup>Perry, Puritanism and Democracy, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>Miller, "Johnathan Edwards to Emerson," pp. 605-606.

on Christ rather than by their own natural intelligence obedience was neither blind nor ignorant but rather, as Ralph Barton Perry put it,

...within its limits the human mind shares and confirms the knowledge of God, and the moral experience and insight of man give meaning to the goodness of God.... God's omnipotence was construed as a beneficent force which guaranteed the triumph of the moral will; and his omniscience as a revelation of the good, which confirmed and extended the worshipper's moral judgment. God was obeyed for the sake of that goodness which his power executes, and which his wisdom illuminates.<sup>11</sup>

By Emerson's day the emotional tide of the Great Awakening in which Edwards shared had ebbed, and sober intellectual currents augmented now by the presence of Lockean philosophy within them reasserted themselves upon New England Calvinist beliefs. Once again pastors returned to their libraries and people to religious formalism. Hence the Calvinism young Emerson discovered was that nourished by the intellectual side of Edwards, shorn of much of the fervid drive that made it live. But his own growing concern for reform soon quickened his interest in the fuller picture of Edwards. He was particularly drawn to Edwards' less suspicious view of nature and to his attempt to bring reason and emotions into synthesis.

### Unitarian Conception of Nature

Even the first generation of New England Puritans though heavily suspicious of human nature took the material and

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<sup>11</sup>Perry, Puritanism and Democracy, p. 370.

spiritual success of their project as a sign of the rightness of their decision to leave the Old for the New World. The New--brutal and wild--World had demanded more than geographical separation from the homeland. The forms for every-day living in England, founded on circumstances far different than those of New England, did not lend themselves well to the problems of surviving in the wilderness. The colonists were forced to rely on their own strengths, skills and ingenuity to develop viable forms of their own. The success of their experiment coaxed New Englanders into a gradual trust of human nature. The early Unitarians, fed by their colonial experience,<sup>12</sup> and to some extent encouraged by Enlightenment ideals, seized upon and developed those aspects of Edwardian theology which stressed the goodness of nature and the capabilities of human intelligence.

The major point of opposition between the Unitarians and Calvinists concerned their views on the goodness and reliability of nature. According to Unitarians man's nature was not fallen. Yet man must sanctify himself--perfect himself in his daily activities. That was the command of God. Sanctification no longer meant, as it did for the Calvinists, the external expression of the fact that the fallen man had been internally restored to the order of grace (justification). It merely meant to become more God-like. Man was born in the image of God.

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Joseph Buckminster, "Sermon," pp. 17-18, in The Transcendentalists: An Anthology, ed. by Perry Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). (Hereinafter referred to as The Transcendentalists.)

Though never fallen, man at birth only very slightly reflected the divine image. Sanctification was the gradual improvement on the image. Man placed himself on the road of progressive sanctification by his own efforts--by knowing and doing God's will. How to discover God's will remained a difficult issue though. While in contrast to Calvinists, Unitarians professed more confidence in the ability of human intelligence, they still believed that unaided it could unveil only little of God's expressed will in nature. A special guide, provided by the Scriptural life of Christ, was needed. Even here, however, Unitarians interpreted the Scriptures according to their own--rather Lockean--notions of experience and understanding.

With Locke's thought influential in their theology, Unitarians were prey to the difficulties inherent in his philosophy. One such problem was whether Locke's theory of knowledge actually made it even possible to apply reason validly to morals and religion. Though at first unaware of this problem, by the time Emerson had reached college the Unitarians were quite sensitive to it, but they felt they had found rectification for Locke's shortcomings in the theory of the moral sense elaborated by the Scottish School of Common Sense.<sup>13</sup> Thus assured, the Unitarians'

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<sup>13</sup>Reasonableness was the norm used by New England Unitarians to decide which Scriptural statements God actually revealed. Their conception of reasonableness depended heavily on Locke's theory of knowledge. Hume had argued that given Locke's basic assumptions no one could rationally establish the truth of moral and religious statements. Were Hume correct the Unitarians, with their theory of Biblical interpretation, would not be able to authenticate almost any important Scriptural passage.

confidence in nature led them to maintain that both nature itself and especially Scriptures express for man those courses of action which conform to God's will. Human understanding, or more particularly the moral sentiment<sup>14</sup>--applicable both to nature and to Scriptures--made God's will intelligible.<sup>15</sup>

### Rejection of Calvinism and Unitarianism

Neither Calvinism nor Unitarianism gave Emerson a satisfactory account of man's relationship to God, hence neither could provide the proper base for deciding norms for reaching perfection. The young man wondered how his heavenly father expected imperfect man to be as perfect as He. The Calvinists maintained that the justified must indeed be perfect, though perfect sanctification in this world could never be achieved. The merit of the Calvinist position was its attempted explanation of how one could remain imperfect (sanctification) and still be called perfect (justification). He respected the realism of the Calvinists for having recognized man's imperfection. But he believed that they went too far in asserting the total corruption and unreliability of human nature. He along

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<sup>14</sup>Unitarians who accepted the theory of the moral sentiment borrowed it from the Scottish School of Common Sense. For the New England Unitarians the moral sentiment was a unified act of intelligence and emotions, issuing from a special sense, wherein they differed strongly from both David Hume and Adam Smith.

<sup>15</sup>Stephen E. Whicher, Freedom and Fate (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), pp. 6-7.



with many of his generation had become convinced that the eminent success of the new nation in carving out a worthwhile--indeed superior--society in the wilderness had come about chiefly through man's reliance on his own intelligence and force. This conviction was a major factor in leading him and many of his fellow New Englanders to a more sanguine view of nature. To use and enjoy nature's goods, to keep all man's natural capacities in place of useful prominence, were cardinal Emersonian principles.

On this point he was closer to the Unitarians. In his estimate the strength of their view resided in their positive stress on the need to live virtuously and especially in their attempt to provide a scheme for sanctification in which both nature and man's reason had been rescued from limbo. Yet he felt their depiction of nature was as much over-drawn as that of the Calvinists'. For the Unitarian doctrine supposed man to have far more ability to achieve good than Emerson thought the facts allowed. That was its fatal weakness.

Neither Calvinism nor Unitarianism sufficiently satisfied him. As he says the rigid party (Calvinism) takes as its principle man's deep liability to sin; the liberal, man's boundless capacity for virtue. Both run off to extremes. The truth he thought must somehow be in between.<sup>16</sup> Each sect had preserved

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur C. McGiffert, Jr., ed., Young Emerson Speaks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1938), p. 83. (Hereinafter referred to as YES.)

part of the integral Christian message but had also distorted the rest; therefore neither had a clear claim to a reliable moral standard. Surmising that the cause of the distortion was sectarianism, he next set about to discover the full Christian revelation, unsullied by the dogmatizing influence of any sect.<sup>17</sup>

### The Search for the Primitive Core of Christian Revelation

For the next phase of his investigation, Emerson hoped to turn to his own purposes the standard Unitarian arguments for the authenticity of Christianity. These arguments--from miracles and the moral sense--require special discussion. The difficulties he had in implementing them forced him first to abandon hope of finding the unsullied historical core of Christianity and then even to reject the possibility of its uniqueness. The following section deals with the features of these arguments, the problems they raised, and the conclusion Emerson reached because of them: that if moral and religious truths were discoverable, only natural intelligence--and not a special revelation--would be able to find them.

### The Appeal to Miracles

The Unitarian appeal to miracles was rather simple in

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

outline. God is all-good. He would not deceive mankind in important matters. Miracles accompanied the founding of Christianity in numbers unrivaled by any other religion. Since only God can perform miracles these must have been a sign by which God had indicated that Christianity is a unique revelation of His will for man. To conclude otherwise would mean that God has deceived man which because of His infinite goodness He would not do.

Emerson's first difficulties with the argument came from Hume's objections against the reality of miracles.<sup>18</sup> Hume held that miracles were violations of the laws of nature--laws which "firm and unalterable experience has established." Since uniform experience amounts to a proof only a superior opposite proof can establish the reality of miracles.<sup>19</sup> The case for miracles depends on reliability of the testimony of witnesses, since none of us has seen a miracle. We only trust the testimony of a witness because of past observation. Since past observation also grounds the laws of nature, we must compare the

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<sup>18</sup> Emerson's first introduction to Hume came at Harvard College. The faculty seems to have had as much animosity as misconception about Hume's thought. They generally believed Hume to have been effectively silenced by the developments in the Scottish School, and were bewildered to discover that he and not Locke had won the day among European scholars. The Hume Emerson first learned of was that of his professors. But in the years immediately to follow, he took Hume under increasingly serious re-appraisal.

<sup>19</sup> David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, in The Philosophical Works, ed. by Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose, reprint of the new edition (London: 1886; Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), Sec. X. Pt. I.

past experience in both cases in order to judge which is more probable. Since testimony concerning religious miracles more commonly violates the truth than that concerning any other matter of fact, we should form a general resolve never to trust the authority of the former. Hume concludes that people accept miracles because of "the passion of surprise and wonder, arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, given a sensible tendency toward belief of those events from which it is derived."<sup>20</sup>

Hume's conclusion is particularly biting.

Christian Religion not only was at first attended by miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity, and who even is moved by faith to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.<sup>21</sup>

Incredible as it may seem Emerson would transform this view into a summary of true belief. We shall return to this.

He initially tried to counter Hume with a rather traditional argument. He grants from his reading of the Common Sense philosopher, Thomas Brown, that Hume correctly stated that faith in testimony was based on the lesser improbability of the facts than of the falsehood of the witness. He further asserts--with implications about the moral sense Hume would reject--that man is endowed with a principle of inevitable belief in the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., Pt. II.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

uniformity of the laws of nature. But miracles do not violate laws of nature. Since God's will is one of the powers of nature, what he wills in a miracle may be a new effect in nature but cannot be an internal contradiction of the laws of nature.<sup>22</sup> Still this response did not fully satisfy him; he strongly suspected that Hume had yet to be effectively answered.

Not long afterwards he hit upon a solution in a paradox typically Emersonian. Hume was absolutely correct. The notion of miracles as special events repulsed the mind. But he was wrong to conclude that there are no miracles. There is a strictly divine character to ordinary phenomena. What revolts the mind is the idea of two kinds of miracles, the ordinary and the special (those to which Christianity turns).<sup>23</sup>

The miraculous is a divine manifestation. A divine manifestation is what happens by powers beyond the capacities open to given agents of our experience. Moral goodness among men, and novelty in all of nature--elevation, as we shall see later--are occurrences beyond the power of the object to explain. "All our life is a miracle...I believe in a manifestation of power

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<sup>22</sup>William Gilman, Alfred Ferguson, et al., eds., The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 5 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1960), Vol. II, pp. 402-403. (Hereinafter referred to as JMN.)

<sup>23</sup>Edward Waldo Emerson, ed., The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, centenary edition, 12 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1903-1904), Vol. I, p. 129. (Hereinafter referred to as Works.) JMN, Vol. III, p. 241; Ralph Rusk, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), Vol. I, pp. 174-175. (Hereinafter referred to as Letters.)

beyond my own, because I am such a manifestation."--e.g., raising an arm, remembering, communicating.<sup>24</sup> In the "Divinity School Address" he remarks that Christ, the finest example of how we should live, felt all man's life was a miracle; Christ knew that "this daily miracle shines as the character ascends."<sup>25</sup>

Emerson equates 'ascension' with 'creation' and 'being'. The moral sentiment identifies the presence of newness, or a creative act. Creative acts reveal divine presence.<sup>26</sup> To his Aunt Mary he writes it is more fit to take every moment of the existence of the universe as a new Creation and everything as a revelation of the divinity to the observer's mind.<sup>27</sup> To be is to be ascending. The fact that any x is (i.e., is ascending) he regards as a continuous miracle. For, the ascension of x is its movement to a plane beyond the power of production by any causal source we might find at that point in our experience. Thus the movement is a continuing manifestation of God. If everything is a miracle then there are no special miracles by which to establish a special divine revelation, viz., Christianity. The Unitarian appeal to miracles is pointless.

#### The Appeal to the Moral Sense

The second Unitarian argument he adopted in hopes of

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<sup>24</sup> McGiffert, YES, pp. 120-126.

<sup>25</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 338-339.

<sup>27</sup> Rusk, Letters, Vol. I, pp. 174-175.

uncovering the core of Christian revelation was from the moral sense. A fairly representative version of the Unitarian appeal to the moral sense was that of Levi Frisbie. Frisbie's approach is of special interest because it reflects the thinking common among many of Emerson's Harvard professors, and because as Frisbie's student he was highly impressed by it.<sup>28</sup> Frisbie used to appeal to the moral sense to argue to God's existence but the basic form of the argument also served to establish many other propositions--among them that Christian revelation was unique and given at a definite point of time in history.

As we find it in Emerson's journal, Frisbie's argument for God's existence begins with the observation that only for virtuous acts do we have a sense or feeling of moral approbation. We feel moral approbation neither in observing the utility of material things, nor even in contemplating the beauty of a work of art, though what grounds aesthetic pleasure is analogous to what grounds our approval of moral activities. Aesthetic pleasure has its roots in "the power we immediately recollect to be

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<sup>28</sup>Levi Frisbie (1783-1822) was Alford Professor of Natural Religion, Moral Philosophy and Civil Polity at Harvard. JMN, Vol. I, p. 23, n. 43. Merrill Davis, "Emerson's 'Reason' and the Scottish Philosophers," New England Quarterly, XVII (June, 1944), pp. 220-221. Emerson's interest in the argument may be gathered from the following. Students were routinely expected to get the salient points of their lessons verbatim. To facilitate this Emerson often set them down in his journals. Frisbie's argument is recorded at length in 1820. JMN, Vol. I, p. 23-24. When Frisbie died in 1822 Emerson notes his passing and repeats the argument in almost the same words. JMN, Vol. II, p. 5. Again, eight years later he wrote a clear resume of it. JMN, Vol. III, p. 207.

necessary to the creation of the painting." Similarly, we find the grounds for moral approbation in the power we recognize as necessary for a moral act to have taken place. "So when in *Morals We see Virtue*, what is it pleases us? Not the Utility; but the idea of moral power and beauty which strikes us as necessary to give birth to the action." As a confirmation of this view Frisbie points out that we feel impelled to stronger moral approval for displays of virtues requiring mightier effort than for homely everyday virtues, which in fact usually have most utility.<sup>29</sup>

Frisbie's analogy between the moral and aesthetic is not by chance. He supposes that aesthetic experience involves an integrated function of both the intellectual and emotional aspects of man, and he intends to make the same case for the functioning of the moral sense. It too is a special synthesis of both the intellectual and emotional. Frisbie speaks as if his audience were quite familiar with the workings of aesthetic experience. He also seems to suggest that the discovery of the existence of God as the moral power is based on a sort of moral experience at least as widely accessible as the aesthetic. The aesthetic stands as preamble to the moral. Indeed later on Emerson would maintain that because moral activity was the highest expression of beauty, the person most sensitive to all forms of beauty, the poet, would be most keenly aware of the actual relations between men and God. Of course Emerson believed that

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<sup>29</sup>JMN, Vol. I, pp. 23-24.



all men could become poets.

As Rusk notes Frisbie's argument lacks full elaboration.<sup>30</sup> Fully developed Frisbie's reasoning assumes this form. First, for everything that happens a cause at least equal to it in power exists. Further, by itself a thing tends to remain in its given state. Hence whatever we discover transformed to a state beyond its previous capacities could not have elevated itself. Some power other than and superior to the object in question must by inference have effected the elevation. It is the idea of the moral power we recognize as necessary for the moral activity to happen that excites moral approbation.

Frisbie infers that the power which ultimately underlies the moral sentiment and the moral elevation which stimulated the sentiment must be God. Since man cannot account for his own virtuous act (elevation) some other being possessed absolutely of the power to effect virtue, namely God, must account for the elevation.

The following passage shows that this is precisely how Emerson understood his professor's argument.

No man addicted to chemistry ever discovered a salt, or an acid, which he thought divine, never discovered a law which he thought God. No man devoted to literary criticism ever imagined that any of the thoughts that formed his study was God. But the man who cultivated the moral powers, ascended to a thought and said This is God. The faith is the evidence.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ralph L. Rusk, The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 87.

<sup>31</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 207. By "faith is the evidence" he

As Emerson's journals indicate, the general structure of the argument could be readily shifted to the case for a specifically and historically revealed Christianity. He relates that close study of religious history shows the most morally elevated features of an era are invariably associated with the presence of Christianity. But no epoch can elevate itself; each is what it is. Therefore, God must be the source of the elevation. Further, moral elevation is a special sign of God's approbation. Therefore, Christianity must be specially revealed.<sup>32</sup>

Abandonment of the Search for the Historical  
and Unique Core of Christian Revelation

In the beginning Emerson maintained that the moral sense showed Christianity was both given at a definite time in the past and was unique in history. But over the five years following his college graduation his perspective changed considerably.

At the start of 1826, he still believed in an historical core of revelation, but he remarks that since revelation is intelligible only through reason, reason might be called a "revelation prior to Revelation."<sup>33</sup> Soon after, he abandoned his intention of establishing an historical deposit, concentrating instead on showing that Christianity was a unique

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means this belief in God is a constitutional fact of human consciousness, and hence cannot be denied without imputing absurdity to nature.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. JMN, Vol. I, p. 80 (1822).

<sup>33</sup>JMN, Vol. II, pp. 160-161.

revelation operative in the present age. He reasoned that the yardstick of moral elevation could apply just as well to events now as to those of the past. The highest degree of moral development signified the presence of the fullest expression of God's will. Since each age progresses morally and since the present age represents the current peak of the ascent, the highest degree of moral development discovered in the present would serve to identify the unique body of Christian revelation operative now. If moral truths develop in every age--as they do par excellence in Christianity--the present status of Christianity not its history is important.<sup>34</sup>

But as the full tensions within the framework of his position occur to him he even rejects the notion that the moral sense affirms the uniqueness of Christian revelation. He believes that, while it is true that moral elevation reveals God's design and that the present elevation reveals it best, human intelligence alone sets up the standards by which to judge the presence of a moral advancement. What reason discovers, however, is that all moral truths evolve--not just those of Christianity. Nor are Christian truths always the most advanced. Hence the moral sense does not disclose Christianity as a unique revelation.<sup>35</sup> Still, he notes, Sacred Scriptures remain the richest mine for moral truth.

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<sup>34</sup>Rusk, Letters, Vol. I, pp. 174-175.

<sup>35</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 15.

Thus though he had hoped the moral sense would show him that Christianity was historically given and unique, instead it convinced him that concern about an historical deposit was of little relevance, and that belief in the uniqueness of Christian revelation was unfounded.

### Critique of Traditional Christianity as a Whole

The difficulties he found in the appeal to miracles and the moral sense directed Emerson to a still more basic criticism of Unitarianism and the whole of traditional Christianity. Regardless of how heartily Christianity insists on the goodness of human nature it also claims that man needs a special store of revelation to uncover true moral and religious beliefs. Therefore it does not actually trust human nature. He levels this criticism directly at Unitarianism, but since he regarded Unitarianism the best manifestation of traditional Christianity, it was intended for all traditional Christianity. If as Unitarians claimed, nature and man's natural capacities are good, i.e., if they are fit to reach their natural ends, then Unitarians fall into inconsistency. On the one hand they stress the goodness of natural capacities; but on the other hand they belittle nature by insisting that without the Scriptures man has no sure guide to a good life.

By stressing the goodness of nature, the older Unitarians had merely intended to vindicate the ability of human intelligence to critically uncover the true content of the Bible.

Unitarian theologians stressed that all our ideas come through experience and reasoning--experience and reasoning taken primarily in the Lockean sense, but also significantly colored by the German "higher criticism" of Herder and others.<sup>36</sup> To interpret Scriptures properly meant to rely only on those positions consistent with the ideas gathered from experience and reason. They thought this approach would purge Sacred Scriptures of those doctrines, for instance the Trinity, which seemed openly contrary to reason and experience. "Higher criticism" was to strengthen respect for Revelation.<sup>37</sup>

Though this strain of Unitarianism deemed human nature reliable enough to soundly interpret Sacred Scripture, it by no means intended to declare that human nature was self-sufficient to learn God's will without Scriptures. The German rationalists, however, had claimed just that, and the New England Calvinists were fond of warning the Unitarians they were plunging head-long in the same direction. But the Unitarians steadfastly declared that reason could neither alter nor increase the content of revelation. The corpus of revelation closed with the Bible.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Faust, "The Background of the Unitarian Opposition to Transcendentalism," pp. 304-305; Rene Wellek, "The Minor Transcendentalists and German Philosophy," New England Quarterly, XV (Dec., 1942), p. 654.

<sup>37</sup>Faust, "The Background of the Unitarian Opposition to Transcendentalism," p. 299.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

Turn toward Self-reliance and Trust  
in the Primacy of Living

Emerson took the step the elder Unitarians had vowed should never follow from their theology, reliance on natural living for personal revelations of God's will. He and many of his peers became quite restive with the ambivalence they sensed at the roots of Unitarianism. If human nature is reliable as Unitarians constantly professed why should they also believe that revelation has come only through the Bible, as if man's intelligence were not trustworthy? In fact only when one finds revelations in himself can the revelations of the Bible become intelligible.

Emerson argued that even though a man may find the doctrine of self-reliance in Scriptures, he will only find it there if he has discovered it already in himself, (through the moral sentiment). "The Bible is a sealed book to him who has not heard its laws from his own soul." Thus there are at least two sorts of revelation (personal and scriptural), the first being the norm for understanding the second. Reason is a "revelation prior to Revelation."<sup>39</sup> In a sermon delivered first in 1830 he declares that the study of the implications in the moral sense gives us the fullest revelations.

A mind of generous nature is early taught to contemplate with delight and reverence its own faculties--

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<sup>39</sup>McGiffert, YES, pp. 111, 170; JMN, Vol. II, pp. 250-251. Emerson had not yet concluded that Christian revelation was not a unique and special revelation.

to reverence them for their use; to believe, that, as God gave them, they are imperfect copies of his own perfections; and that he is well pleased in the good they produce; that the purposes of God are best deduced from his works.<sup>40</sup>

Thus his investigation led him to several radical conclusions. On the one hand neither moral nor religious truths could be derived from the teachings of traditional Christianity as he had formerly supposed. Indeed the doctrines of Christianity were distorted since they falsely presumed nature was not fully reliable. Moreover, special revelation and hence the need for special miracles was superfluous. On the other hand human intelligence could well provide its own original religious and moral inspirations, indeed every moment could bring a new divine revelation. As yet he was not sure how this could come about. But he believed nature was trustworthy, and that if moral and religious truths were to be discovered at all, only natural intelligence would be able to find them.

As his hopes for a moral and religious standard within Christianity dwindled, he increased his concern for the possibility of finding the standard within nature itself. For a time his critique of Christianity and of natural reason went on hand in hand without perhaps too much differentiation of effort. But by 1832 he was in the midst of making explicit attempts--aided by philosophical writings from the empiricist and idealist traditions--at discovering how man's natural capacities could provide

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<sup>40</sup> McGiffert, YES, pp. 84-85.

the standard. His search culminated in a critique of both the empiricist and idealist traditions, and in a positive statement of his own philosophical thought.



## CHAPTER II

### EMERSON'S CRITIQUE OF TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Emerson developed a philosophical procedure of his own because, contrary to his expectations, traditional empiricism and idealism proved wanting. He had turned to them for help as he gradually recognized that reliance on Christianity was futile, and only natural intelligence could promise any hope of discovering truths about the world. Empiricism and idealism failed because, like Calvinism and Unitarianism on a theological plane, they, on a philosophical plane, were each based on a one-sided view of man's nature and nature as a whole. Empiricism accentuated the senses at the expense of reason; idealism, reason at the expense of the senses. As a result both derived myopic philosophical procedures and faulty descriptions of reality--the one overstressing the material, the diverse and changing; the other, exaggerating the ideal, the unified and stable. Emerson decided that since traditional philosophy in framing its conceptions of the nature of man had not relied entirely on natural intelligence, he would have to discover a genuine philosophical approach for himself.

This chapter deals with his critique of traditional empiricism and idealism. Though treated separately the same order

of study is used for each: first, his use of the terms 'empiricism' or 'idealism'; second, his understanding of their basic positions; third, his study of their merits and weaknesses. The final section of this chapter shows how his critique contributed to the development of his own philosophical procedure.

### Meaning of 'Empiricism'

Emerson used the term 'empiricism' principally to designate the positivist type of philosophy he associated with the British tradition continuous through Locke, Hume especially, and in some respects the "Scottish School." Other terms he uses for 'empiricism' are 'sensism' and 'sceptical philosophy'. He first contacted empiricist writers in his classes at Harvard College and the Divinity School.<sup>1</sup> But not until a little later, when he began to recognize the true value of Hume's thought, did he give empiricism a scholar's attention. Hume's forceful impression on him led him practically to identify empiricism with Hume.

Most younger Unitarians seemed to have made the same identification. They too considered Hume the supreme empiricist. Moreover contrary to many of their elders they maintained that the basic assumptions of Locke led directly into the philosophy of Hume. Hence the appellation of "scepticism" which they stamped on empiricism. By scepticism they meant that which their teachers only suspected in Locke but which stood explicitly

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<sup>1</sup>Emerson read Francis Bacon, Locke, Montaigne, Hume and others as school studies.

in Hume: doubtfulness concerning the rational foundations for moral and religious statements.

### The Empiricist Position

Emerson became most seriously interested in Hume's philosophy as his conviction grew that Hume's criticism of Locke was correct. Hume had pointed out that, contrary to Locke, given the sensist theory of knowledge there was no way to confirm religious or moral statements. Emerson suspected, however, that the sensist theory of knowledge rested on a faulty assumption, the mind-body bifurcation of man. He studied Hume and the positivistic frame of mind to learn whether his suspicions were well founded. He decided they were.

According to Hume's theory of knowledge--and that of the positivistic<sup>2</sup> tradition following him--man performs two separate cognitive functions, sensing and reasoning. The former alone directly contacts facts; the latter simply relates ideas derived from facts. Man's sole direct cognitive relation with facts comes through sensing. Moreover, only the quantitative in sense-experience lends itself to valid factual generalizations. Thus no non-quantitative, non-material, generalizations about the realm of facts are possible. Further, no evidence in sense-experience supports factual generalizations about necessary

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<sup>2</sup>The positivistic view maintains that only those factual generalizations are possible which are derivable (directly or indirectly) from empirical science.

connections between events or about the universal presence of a particular factor among specific events past, present and to come.

Hence some purported factual generalizations, such as those affirming the reality of the causal relation or the presence of universal order in the world, actually arise not from experience but from a feeling of vividness which springs up in a natural association with repeatedly recurring experiences. Such generalizations are belief-statements.<sup>3</sup> Hume calls them "natural beliefs." They are not factual. Though of great practical value, natural beliefs have no speculative import. Thus the two chief cosmological arguments for God's existence--from causality and order--are invalidated at a stroke. Neither are grounded in sense-experience and hence cannot tell us anything about reality; nor can they rest on reason since reason depends entirely on sense-experience for its content.

Hume argued that moral statements in like manner are not supported by sense experience or by reason. In brief, reason by itself only relates ideas among themselves, ideas which are all ultimately derived from sense-experience. He gives a series of arguments to show further that only feelings not reason can motivate human behavior. An idea must be desirable in order for a man to act on it.

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<sup>3</sup>A belief is defined as "a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression." David Hume, Treatise on Human Nature, Bk. I, pt. 2, Sec. 7.

As long as it is allowed, that reason has no influence on our passions and action, it is in vain to pretend that morality is discovered only by a deduction of reason. An active principle can never be founded on an inactive; and if reason be inactive in itself it must remain so...whether it exerts itself in natural or moral subjects.<sup>4</sup>

Moral statements are rooted in special feelings called moral sentiments. Feelings may indicate something about one's subjective state, but nothing factual about the world. Thus some moral statements may be natural beliefs--of great practical but of no speculative significance.

### Critique of Hume and Empiricism

Emerson's critique of Hume centers about his failure to recognize that reason does have a direct relation to matters of fact, that reason makes factual judgments in a unified function with the rest of man's powers (his will, senses, feelings) and that natural belief or sentiment<sup>5</sup> is the form these judgments take. While Hume recognized only mathematics and empirical science as legitimate approaches to generalization, and only the latter as factual, Emerson regarded natural belief an approach to generalization midway between mathematics and empirical science, and only the middle way as genuinely dealing with reality.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Bk. III, Pt. I, sec. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Sentiment, for Emerson, means judgment unified with feeling. He borrows the term from the Scottish School. Reid, Works, Vol. III, p. 309; Stewart, Works, Vol. V, p. 160, in "Emerson's 'Reason' and the Scottish Philosophers," by Davis, p. 222.

The middle region of our being is the temperate zone. We may climb into the thin and cold realm of pure geometry and lifeless science, or sink into that of sensation. Between these extremes is the equator of life, of thought, of spirit, of poetry--a narrow belt.<sup>6</sup>

His thinking had been strongly influenced by the Scottish philosophers, Reid, Stewart, and Brown. The Scottish School of Common Sense considered natural beliefs as empirical data of consciousness; they called these beliefs moral sentiments. Thomas Reid in arguing that two of these beliefs--the reality of the external world and the presence of order in it--had factual significance, declared they could be considered fictional only if there were no successful planning and carrying out of plans in everyday life. But since men did successfully organize their activities according to plans, these beliefs must have factual import.<sup>7</sup> Emerson was especially taken by the insistence among these philosophers that reason does have an empirical grounding, and by their attempt to base their argument on an appeal to everyday living. As a college senior he was convinced that, while the language of Reid's argument had obscured its thrust, it decisively rebutted Hume's theory of natural belief.<sup>8</sup> And though he would in time build his own critique he always

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<sup>6</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Bock, "Anglo-American Common Sense and German Geist," American Quarterly, VIII (Summer, 1956), pp. 159-160.

<sup>8</sup> Emerson, "The Present State of Ethical Philosophy," in Two Unpublished Essays, ed. Edward E. Hale ((N.p.): Lamson, Wolfe, and Co., 1895).

considered Hume weakest at this point.<sup>9</sup>

Emerson could find no true middle ground between Hume's assertion that neither the senses nor reason nor natural belief could establish the reality of order, and the implicit conclusion that no order exists. For Hume that middle ground was supposed to be the practicability of natural belief. But in Emerson's mind either belief includes no factual assertion, and action on that basis rests on illusion, or if action on the basis of natural belief is not illusory, then the belief includes factual assertion.<sup>10</sup> A belief which appears to be factual either is or is not factual. Insofar as a belief is true it can successfully direct activities; insofar as it is false it cannot. If all man's natural beliefs were false he would possess no reliable way to live. He would not know how he ought to act. The result would be a paralysis--men would do nothing.

Emerson was threatened by such a paralysis while he struggled with the sceptical implications of empiricism.<sup>11</sup> He rescued himself with the decision that the factual claims of natural beliefs (e.g., order in nature) could be trusted. The test of true belief would be its power to direct man to uttermost commitment to living.<sup>12</sup> He often called his trust in natural

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. JMN, Vol. II, p. 207 (1830); Rusk, Letters, Vol. I, p. 450 (1835).

<sup>10</sup>JMN, Vol. II, p. 252; Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 282; Whicher, Freedom and Fate, 5

<sup>12</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, pp. 136-137.

beliefs "self-reliance," which was really a confidence in the ability of native intelligence to work up norms for activities out of the activities themselves. Intellect and emotions, which Hume took as primarily separated, Emerson regarded as twin aspects of a single function, conscious human living.<sup>13</sup>

Emerson recognized that positivism had several important strengths. It affirmed the reality of matter; it recognized diversity, multiplicity, change. But he also believed it was short-sighted in ignoring or rejecting the reality of "spiritual facts."

He called the empiricist to task for restricting attention to generalizations based on quantitative measurements, for assuming that only matter exists, and that the only order in nature was that expressible in physical laws. He linked these assumptions to the mechanistic thesis that all activities including all those of man were entirely determined by changeless physical laws.<sup>14</sup> Man was thereby deprived of freedom and all nature, of evolution. He rejected these conclusions. "It is essential to a true theory of nature and man, that it should contain somewhat progressive, should ascribe freedom to the will, or benevolent designs to the Deity."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>By this function man discovers his relations; he reconciles himself to life; he knows what he is doing; he becomes free; he lives. Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 151; Vol. III, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Emerson, *Works*, Vol. III, p. 255.

<sup>15</sup>*JMN*, Vol. V, p. 182.



He thought the positivists missed the spiritual dimension of reality because they held to the unwarranted assumption that only the senses had reliable access to matters of fact, while reason and the feelings functioned in a subordinate role. This mistaken bifurcation methodologically excluded them from acknowledging the reality of those features in experience which could not be discovered by the senses alone. Freedom, creativity, order, moral and religious truths, were some such. Only intelligence and feelings could grasp these. Hume was forced to explain man's affirmation of them as natural beliefs having no objective import.

Emerson held that ordinary life experiences should be the basis of all philosophizing. From his perspective ordinary living did not support the empiricist claims for bifurcation. Freedom, creativity, developmental order, stability, are just as present in man's day to day living as are determinacy, diversity, and change. The presence of these features indicates that the powers by which these features are grasped (intelligence, feelings, senses) are all operative in experience.

### Meaning of 'Idealism'

Emerson did not work out his own view solely as a result of his critique of empiricism. His study of idealism also contributed substantially to his position. For a while the force of Hume's arguments on behalf of empirical scepticism threatened Emerson's beliefs almost to the point of paralysis. He took up

the consideration of the idealist tradition in hopes of counterbalancing empirical scepticism and of shoring up his beliefs. To his disappointment he eventually discovered that idealism also suffered from a faulty theory of knowledge, which indeed rendered paradoxical those aspects of reality which by and large empiricism did not.

Because he explored so many idealist philosophies<sup>16</sup> it is difficult to link his use of 'idealism' with any one person or in fact with any one philosophical camp. For the time under consideration (1828-1836) we may safely exclude Hegel from his primary interest as well as any of the classic Neo-Platonists in particular, and any of the numerous Oriental mystics who would draw the center of his attention in the 1840's. From 1828-1836 he concentrated mainly on Plato, the classic Neo-Platonic tradition in general; Cudworth; and, through the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Carlyle, Kant and the German Romantics.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly he uses 'idealism' in either of two ways: to designate the Neo-Platonic tradition, including Plato,<sup>18</sup> classic

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<sup>16</sup> Among them are Plato; Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, Iamblicus, among the classical Neo-Platonists; Cudworth, among the Cambridge Neo-Platonists; Kant and Hegel; Victor Cousin, a popularizer of Hegel; several German and British Romantics, among them, Goethe, Coleridge, and Carlyle.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. William J. Sowder, Emerson's Impact on the British Isles and Canada (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1966), pp. 184-215.

<sup>18</sup> Emerson read Plato through the bias of the Neo-Platonic tradition. Many reasons support this view: his extensive reading of Cudworth before and during the early 1830's, preparing

Neo-Platonism and Cudworth; or to designate the Romantic tradition, including the German Romantics, Coleridge, Carlyle, and perhaps Kant by anticipation.<sup>19</sup> When applied to the former group the term often carries with it a critical tone; when used in reference to the latter it usually suggests approbation. But in his critique of the idealist tradition he rejected both.

### The Idealist Position

A general description of the idealist point of view comes to us in Nature.<sup>20</sup> Idealism gives primacy to ideal unities; physical unities (or structures) in experience are inferior to and probably dependent on the ideal. Ideal unities are in some sense the reflected thoughts of God. Insofar as they reflect God they are beyond time and space, i.e., they are changless, necessary and most "real." Participation in these ideals deifies the participant. On the other hand material things scarcely reflect God because they are in time and space, i.e., they are changing, contingent, and only barely "real." Heightened

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him for such a reading; his heightened interest in Plato coinciding with his study of Coleridge and Carlyle, both of whom inclined toward a rather Neo-Platonic view; most important, his enthusiastic reliance on the translation of Plato's works by Thomas Taylor, an avowed and almost fierce adherent to the Neo-Platonic interpretation of Plato. Cf. Walter Harding, Emerson's Library (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1967). Thomas Taylor's Work includes the chief Neo-Platonic commentaries on Plato.

<sup>19</sup> Emerson read Kant mainly through the eyes of Coleridge and Carlyle.

<sup>20</sup> Works, Vol. I, pp. 47-60.

participation in matter is not deifying. Man should concern himself with the ideal realm rather than with materialities since only by identification with the divine ideals can man become like God. Religion and ethics, Emerson remarks, introduce theory into life. When they adopt an idealist theory they preach the subordination of physical nature to the ideal. They make the material depend on the ideal, and next teach men to suspect physical nature. For since the physical is not divine it cannot deify or lead man to true reality.<sup>21</sup>

### Critique of Idealism

Just as with empiricism he weights the comparative strengths and limits of the idealist tradition. He admits that idealism has its legitimate appeal particularly because it stresses the reality of enduring unities. It creates a view of the world "desirable to the mind," with regard to both speculative philosophy and to practical morality. "For seen in the light of thought, the world is phenomenal; and virtue subordinates it to the mind." Emerson leaves his audience to infer why this view should attract the mind. The implication is that upon discovering that the world is really only a dependent appearance of mind, it finds security in what up until then seemed an alien and threatening environment. Virtue somehow effects the obedience of phenomena to mind.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

But idealism has further advantages. It places the world in God. The mind of God unifies all actions and events in an eternal present in which the turmoil of change loses significance. Thus an idealist need be little concerned for the trivial--for the facts of imperfection, evil, multiplicity, change--as if as empiricists contend, these facts were absolute limits to one's ability to discover truth. Again Emerson leaves the reader to find out why--and the answer waits near the surface. For an idealist these factors become inconsequential since he believes everything reaches synthesis in the mind of an absolute and all-good God.

But Emerson's praise already betrays impatience. Idealism

...respects the end too much to immerse itself in the means. It sees something more important in Christianity than the scandals of ecclesiastical history... and, very incurious concerning persons, or miracles and not at all disturbed by chasms of historical evidence; it accepts from God the phenomenon as it finds it, as the pure and awful form of religion in the world.<sup>23</sup>

He himself did not flinch at scandal in religion. But only after a long struggle could he feign indifference to persons, or miracles or gaps in historical evidence. Christianity did not stand or fall on such evidence for him, but the idealist's repose in the Supreme Good has a fatalistic inclination. The idealist is so taken up by the end that he--mistakenly as it turns out--construes the means worthy of only grudging attention. Opposition and evil do not rouse him. He is primarily a

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

spectator and a doer only to become a better spectator.<sup>24</sup> Emerson showed some sympathy for this mood, since to begin by taking the world as it is man must be an observer. Yet if observing be man's primary occupation he will do very little of it, since observing depends in every case upon acting.

Idealism had several serious shortcomings. Because it over-stressed unity it denied reality to matter and hence could not explain limitation, multiplicity and change. Further, it removed God from man by the absoluteness of God's perfection and the degree of lowliness it attributed to man. Moreover, because it falsely construed real structural unities as absolute and static rather than concrete, active, and progressive, it completely ignored the processive aspect of reality, and the need to continually rely on action as man's basic source of truth about the world.<sup>25</sup>

Just as he decided in his critique of empiricism, he regarded the idealist theory of knowledge as the crucial problem. Like the empiricists, idealists came upon most of their difficulties because their theory of knowledge was one-sided. Sensism had separated the mind from the body, making the latter through sense experience the sole mode of direct contact with matters of fact; idealism with a similar bifurcation took

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>"It is essential to a true theory of nature and of man, that it should contain something progressive....All the uses of nature admit of being summed in one, which yields the activity of man an infinite scope." Ibid., p. 61.

only the clearly rational as real, while relegating the sensible to the level of mere appearance. The idealist bifurcation was just as unwarranted as that of the sensist. From Emerson's perspective matter, process, diversity, were just as present in ordinary experience as were unities and stabilities. The recognition of both the material and the ideal in one's ordinary experience meant to him that both the senses and reason were operative in experience: both had direct access to matters of fact.

Idealism he concludes may fulfill the desire of the mind because it places matter under law. But it does not satisfy the demands of spirit since in so placing matter under law it also blurs the reality of matter. Spirit requires that a true theory of reality render due account of both aspects of ordinary experience.<sup>26</sup> At most, idealism would make "a useful introductory hypothesis." But its descriptions are too narrow, its initial assumptions leave too much out. "I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. Let us speak her fair." Unfortunately, idealism "makes nature foreign to me, and does not account for that consanguinity which we acknowledge to it."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> JMN, V, pp. 182-183.

<sup>27</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. I, pp. 59, 63.

Inclusion of the Romantics in the  
Critique of Idealism

Emerson intended his rather diffuse arguments to apply to the whole idealist tradition. It is clear he meant to call the Neo-Platonists under fire since he specifically mentions Plato, Plotinus, the Manicheans. It is less obvious, from the text of Nature, that the Romantic idealists (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, especially) were to be included too. Yet the circumstances surrounding the writing of Nature show that such was his intent.

While in Europe in 1832 he visited the British Romantics, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle. It had been a period of great crisis for him. His wife had died, his dissatisfaction with traditional Christianity at last forced him to resign his pastorate, and as he pursued his readings in philosophy his hope to resolve the puzzles of human existence philosophically faltered in a maze of divergent opinions. As a result his outlook on life was seriously threatened with fragmentation. Though he held firmly to his belief in self-reliance and that living would yield intelligibility, he was at a loss how to concretize his beliefs.

The British Romantics appealed to him because, with their doctrines of individualism and the primacy of Reason, they came very close to restoring unity and balance to the philosophical description of life. It is not surprising, therefore, that when he acceded to the suggestion of a recuperative trip to Europe he included in his itinerary first-hand conversations with them.



He felt they could be instrumental in leading him to reach a genuinely balanced view. Once again he would be disappointed--but never with more positive effect.

Just after having completed his visits with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Carlyle, Emerson observes in his journal that in true philosophical fundamentals all three lacked sufficient insight. He praises God for having shown him the men he wished to see, Lander, Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth, and for having "comforted and confirmed him in his convictions." Though they showed him much, he admits, never again would he so naively live by idealized portraits of men whom "the world calls wise." They were well-read, earnest, sensible men, but no more than that. "Especially are they all deficient all these four--in different degrees but all deficient--in insight into religious truth. They have no idea of that species of moral truth which I call the first philosophy."<sup>28</sup>

### Emerson's Conception of First Philosophy

This criticism becomes quite significant, once his idea of First Philosophy is grasped. To begin with it indicates that he had worked out at least a nugget form of his own philosophical stance by the time he reached England. Indeed he was already making notes for Nature.<sup>29</sup> More importantly this criticism of the

<sup>28</sup> JMN, Vol. IV, p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Romantics is basically the same he would level at idealists in his completed version of Nature four years later.

'First Philosophy' is Philosophy of Mind, the study which catalogues the functions of the mind and specifies the limits of their legitimate uses. It is called 'first' because no further philosophical investigation can be undertaken until the limits of human understanding are clearly demarked. Emerson had as examples before him the efforts of Locke, Hume and Francis Bacon, from whom he borrowed the term.<sup>30</sup>

In his First Philosophy the young American followed the Romantics in making Reason and Understanding the fundamental distinction among the cognitive powers.<sup>31</sup> Reason is an integrated function grasping an actual situation as a whole. Understanding is a specialized and exclusive exercise of the mind. Its function is to use one or another cognitive power in isolation in order, for short-range needs, to deal with some segmented aspect of reality. Reason is intuitive whereas Understanding operates through multiple sense observations or explicit logical sequences. Only reason contacts reality--laws in the actual, on-going, concrete. Understanding handles appearances--rather disparate concrete facts, for instance, or abstract laws. The one, since it respects dynamism promotes creativity; the other, since it operates on isolated, static segments tends to

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<sup>30</sup>JMN, V, p. 50, n. 154.

<sup>31</sup>Rusk, Letters, I, p. 412.

re-enforce the traditional and customary. Moreover, Understanding is supposed to serve Reason, but in an unbalanced life-scheme it instead assumes an independent status--substituting appearances for reality.<sup>32</sup> Traditional sensism and idealism both resulted from such misuses of Understanding.

One further thing must be stressed. Only Reason contacts reality, but Reason only functions when man is in the state of unprejudiced spontaneous behavior. Natural living alone stirs Reason to yield its truths. Neither repeated sense observations nor rational deductions suffice. Thus Emerson conceived First Philosophy as the science which relies entirely upon simple spontaneous acts of natural living for its knowledge of reality.

#### Lack of First Philosophy among Romantics

When, therefore, he criticized the British Romantics for lacking First Philosophy he meant they had not derived their knowledge about reality solely from the actual experience of living. They asserted the doctrine of Reason abstractly. But since they did not develop their doctrine through spontaneous living they never actually relied on Reason and hence never possessed true First Philosophy. Instead they attempted to base it on Understanding (i.e., through logical argumentation).

This particular criticism strongly supports the view that he intended to include the Romantics in Nature's arguments

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<sup>32</sup>JMN, V, pp. 269-276.

against idealism. He was already at work on Nature when he visited them. Moreover, he rejected Romantic idealism for fundamentally the same reason he later rejected idealism in general in Nature. It tried to erect philosophy on the basis of Understanding, mistakenly assuming that one of the specialized functions of Understanding (abstract reason) dealt with reality as a whole. Consequently both classical idealists and Romantics--but the Romantics less than the others--shared the same root failures in their philosophies, loss of real content and dynamism

### Positive Directionalities Resulting from the Critique of Traditional Philosophy

When he published Nature Emerson was still somewhat of an idealist though not in a traditional sense. For him all empiricist and idealist theories based on Understanding were traditional. By that standard Romantic philosophy was thereby traditional, while his was not. He criticized the Romantics not for being idealists as such but for resting their idealism on Understanding. Indeed at first his thoughts closely resembled those of the Romantics. Living was the condition for discovering the a priori ideas of Reason.

Yet he was far more drawn to modify theory in face of lived experience than to modify experience according to the demands of theory. Though at times he called his philosophy idealism, at other times he called it the philosophy of spirit to suggest the vital quality of Reason. In fact, he once referred to himself

as a "practical idealist."<sup>33</sup> The more he threw himself into natural living the more his idealism softened. Increasingly it came to mean the recognition that developmental laws were genuinely operative throughout experience. What before were regarded as a priori ideas faded into natural directionalities within beings, directionalities discoverable (for instrumental purposes) only by spontaneous living. Living became not only the condition but the source for truths about the world. His mature philosophy suggests an incipient pragmatism.

During the period in which he scrutinized the views of traditional philosophers, he used the Romantic distinction between Reason and Understanding not only as a foil from which to launch his own philosophy but also as a tool by which to bring his critique into coherent synthesis.

Sensism recognized only brute matter, multiplicity, change; idealism, only ideas, unity, stability. Neither could incorporate the positive features of the other. Actual living, however, showed all features were real. Both theories had grasped just part of the truth. Both rendered some aspects of reality into paradoxes, irresolvable because each had founded their theory exclusively on one or another function of Understanding---idealism on abstract reasoning, sensism on sense observation. The result was a severance of mind from body and the ideal from the material.

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<sup>33</sup>JMN, V, 135.

Among the sensists the Scottish school of Common Sense made the strongest bid to mend the split. They rightly asserted that reason had an empirical base for its generalizations. They correctly attempted to support their view on the fact that the opposite stance contradicts the universal experience of men, who, in their daily lives, do suppose a world accessible to reason. Their theory was insufficient nonetheless because while they appealed to the primacy of living, they did so in a spectator-like way, as a generalization culled from sense observations. Further, they gathered their facts into logically discursive arguments. Logically discursive arguments and generalizations from sense observations are proper to Understanding, not reason.

Among the idealists the Romantics came closest to successfully closing the rift. They proclaimed that Reason had an intuitional grasp of the universal in the concrete. But they too were unable to support their claim properly. For while they stated that only actual living could give evidence of their position, they in fact remained entrenched in the spectator appeal to living, rooting their beliefs in appeals to sense evidence and arguments of explicit logic rather than in actual spontaneous living. They too rested upon Understanding.

Emerson concluded that no philosopher had as yet presented a balanced view of reality because no one had tried to live an entirely natural life. Hence, no one had significantly tapped the power of Reason. His critique solidly confirmed his

intention to make the attempt for himself--in hopes of at last striking upon a truly balanced viable description of the world.

### Summary

Emerson's development from a traditional believer in supernatural revelation to a self-reliant believer in natural living reveals the gradual evolution of two key concepts in his approach to philosophy. The first is the setting aside of pre-conceived opinions about reality; the second, the whole-hearted effort to derive all beliefs entirely from natural living. Chapter I concludes with his decision that only natural intelligence could reveal truths about the world, that somehow self-reliance and trust of natural living were preferable to the half-truths of authoritarian religions suspicious of nature. Chapter II follows his attempts to support and concretize his beliefs by natural intelligence with the help of traditional philosophers. He found their approaches wanting because they did not draw their doctrines or overt justification from living. They too distrusted nature. It became clear to him he would have to work out his philosophy for himself. As he progressed in his own approach he translated his belief in self-reliance into the doctrine of simplicity (the suspension of prejudices), and his belief in the primacy of living into the doctrine of spontaneity (full dependence upon the experience of living). These two doctrines are the subject-matter for the next two chapters, which comprise the positive exposition of his philosophical procedure.

### CHAPTER III

#### SIMPLICITY: THE RETURN TO THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING

Emerson's philosophical procedure aimed at confirming beliefs which claimed inclusion of true factual descriptions of the world. He had special interest in moral and religious beliefs, among them belief in God. But just as his critique of traditional religion convinced him that only philosophy could confirm the claims of moral and religious beliefs, his critique of traditional philosophy persuaded him that only a new philosophical procedure could make possible the confirmation of any belief--moral, religious or otherwise. His new procedure consisted of two interrelated phases, both found in the lived situation and derived directly from it. The first, simplicity, aimed at reaching or regaining an unprejudiced, natural lifestyle; the second, spontaneity, tried to make the natural lifestyle the ground for all theoretical beliefs about the world. Simplicity is the subject of this chapter; spontaneity, the focus of the next.

For clarity I have separated the study of the two aspects of the procedure, though Emerson himself did not explicitly distinguish them. He was disinclined to devote a thorough-going speculative explanation of the two-sidedness of his theory,



since he disliked making what he thought bookish and merely technical analysis. But the phases do show up in his working out of concrete problems.

Two major sections comprise our study of simplicity. The first deals with the achieving of simplicity. We begin with an examination of the "youth metaphor," specially chosen by him to convey his doctrine of simplicity. According to the metaphor man must regain the innocence of childhood in order to philosophize accurately. As we shall see, the effort to recover innocence involves on the one hand the negating of reliance on Understanding, thus removing man from blinding cultural preconceptions; and on the other hand the affirming of reliance on Reason, thus leading him into total commitment to natural living. The doctrine of simplicity rests on the assumption that nature is reliable. The second major section considers the basis for that belief.

### The "Youth Metaphor"

Most often when Emerson intends to discuss the first phase of the procedure, simplicity, he employs one metaphor among several developed for that purpose, viz., the "youth metaphor." It deserves close consideration.

One preliminary observation about Emerson's use of metaphor. He was not a technical philosopher nor an academician and he steadfastly refused that role. Instead he saw himself in the

tradition of Plato, a poet-philosopher.<sup>1</sup> "Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato." To be a genuine philosopher, one "must be more than a philosopher." He must also be a poet in the fullest sense of the term--i.e., the man without impediment, who maintains a balance between his speculative and active powers, between his tendency to reduce everything to unity and his tendency to stress diversity, between his inclination toward the abstract and the removed and his inclination toward the concrete and ordinary. Plato closely approximated the ideal. "Plato is clothed in the powers of a poet, stands upon the highest place of the poet." He regarded Plato as the ancient proto-type to the ideal American democrat. "He is a great average man," who blends the best of thinking with down-to-earth-living. "A great common-sense is his warrant and qualification to be the world's interpreter." But Plato's short-coming was that he did not quite achieve the balance. He used his poetic gift. Instead of letting his poetic power take its rightful command over him he directed it by his intellect. In his quest for intellectual unity he tried "to dispose of nature." He tipped the scale toward the speculative and to that extent distorted his descriptions of the universe. Hence, like most philosophers he remained

<sup>1</sup>John Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays, by Milton Konvitz and Stephan Whicher, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 27, et seq. (Hereinafter referred to as Critical Essays.)

<sup>2</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 6; Vol. IV, pp. 40, 43, 47-56, 61-62, 75-79.

a mere philosopher. Emerson believed that to become the poet-philosopher of the new Republic he must succeed where Plato did not. Thus his philosophical position dictated that his style should be literary rather than literal. Hence, his use of metaphorical language--which nonetheless was controlled and calculated for serious philosophical purposes.

The "youth metaphor" was designed to convey his notion of simplicity. The outset of Nature makes clear that only if a man remains youthful in outlook can he hope to relate to his situation as it is. Emerson notes how differently grown-ups and children regard scenes of nature. For example, few adults ever really notice the sun except superficially--they know just that in daylight they can see. By contrast the sun "shines into the eye and the heart of the child." He then makes this point: "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy into the era of Manhood."<sup>3</sup> To be childlike evokes the image of innocence, a frame of mind that lets reality unfold itself as it is. The cultural warp which blurs true vision has been set aside for candor.

In Emerson's eyes a child would take things as he finds them; he would act on what he finds merely on the basis of what these things show him. The child does not engage in much reflection on what he sees. Nor would he find it intelligible to

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 9; Vol. III, p. 26.

color the world with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of his elders. Such assumptions never confuse and hinder his ability to act in everyday life. Lastly a child will act without guile and duplicity, unperturbed by formalized doctrine or the social structures of personal loss and gain. He does so calmly and single-mindedly according to the demands of the present. Thus the ideal was to recapture the simplicity of childhood, to observe things as they show themselves--without interposing any sort of preconceptions upon the observation--and to act on the basis of the lived-experience rather than for any imposed motive of personal gain.

The "youth metaphor" discloses two sides to simplicity: removal from trust in Understanding--the suspension of cultural preconceptions; at the same time, a turn to commitment to Reason --total surrender to natural living.

### Removal of Preconceptions

Reenstatement of a youthful innocence demanded the purge of customary presumptions about reality. We have already witnessed Emerson's odyssey through various previously established ways of looking at man's situation in the world. Each step of the venture, though it held out what seemed great and perhaps lasting promise of human fulfilment, left his desires unfulfilled. He came to distrust any element of received culture especially insofar as it would suggest itself as a ready-made and timelessly

sure foundation upon which to build one's moral edifice. Any suggestion which comes from society and even from one's friends insofar as they reflect pre-established procedures are not to be relied on. They can mislead so many ways, sometimes purposely. The ideal was to judge for one's self, recognizing, of course, that even that has its pitfalls.

To procure the innocence of youth, it was not enough to desert the city and retire to one's study to procure this innocence of youth. "To go into solitude a man needs to retire as much from his chambers as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me."<sup>4</sup> The city, a man's friends, his private lodgings all reflect a certain cultural perspective. A person who desires to discover truth must not let them prejudice his own view. If they follow him into his solitary search he will continue to apprehend things according to the preconceptions of the established culture. Putting aside the settings of city-life represents a removal of the pervasive source of pre-conceptions, one's received cultural beliefs. But to put them aside man must turn to nature.

Emerson believed man would be most apt to initiate the unobstructed state of mind among natural scenes rather than in the city. Being in the wilderness is "more dear and connate than in the streets or villages." But he was not advocating a move back to agrarian society, for that of itself would accomplish nothing.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 7.

The power which produces the natural outlook does not reside in nature alone any more than in man alone--but in both together when related in a special way. Nor was he intimating that innocence could not be achieved in the city but only that it would be easier to discover in natural surroundings, the outmoded laws and traditions cluttering the city confine man and positively discourage creative responsiveness to new demands of living. By contrast the most impressive dimension of nature is its unboundedness and spontaneous capacity for continued growth. This aspect of nature strikes a responsive chord in man. "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature." Man too is part of nature; for him too should living be spontaneous and unbounded--just as it once was for him as a child. "In the woods--a man casts off his years--and is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth."<sup>5</sup>

Emerson suggests that once man regains this youthful attitude its supreme value makes itself evident, for he recognizes it as a new and better state of mind. "It takes him by surprise, and yet it is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing rightly."<sup>6</sup>

The choice of the "youth metaphor" was quite strategic. As

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<sup>5</sup>Works, Vol. I, pp. 8-31.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 11; Vol. II, pp. 279-280.

Michael Cowan relates in City of the West, Emerson's lectures were addressed to "wild men" and farmers no more than were Wordsworth's poems directed toward "idiot boys or solitary reapers." His intended audience was primarily the young Americans leaving the farms in rapidly growing numbers to spearhead westward expansion and urbanization.<sup>7</sup> He was appealing to sentiments and experiences still fresh in their minds, hoping to articulate together with them an approach to social development consistent with the ideal of freedom and equality among men. The approach was to live naturally, to construct within one's lived situation social institutions which would promote further natural living, to abolish those which would hinder it. As Cowan puts it, Emerson intended to challenge the urban audience "not to destroy but to remake the city...according to the organic nature of the city dwellers themselves."<sup>8</sup>

### Surrender to Natural Living

One side of simplicity was the dispelling of preconceptions; surrender to natural living was the other side. Emerson proposes

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Cowan, City of the West (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 18-20; p. 220. At the time Emerson wrote Nature (1836) he was 33. Over ten million Americans were then as young or younger than Emerson; only about four million were older. The median age was about 17.6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, ed., Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1949), p. 28.

<sup>8</sup>Cowan, City of the West, p. 220.

that the proper frame of mind should rely wholly on natural living and not belittle at the outset any human capacity--reason, feelings, senses, or will. To do otherwise would prejudice the venture, as had traditional religion and philosophy. The simple man should let all his capacities be; he should allow his total person, his body, affections, will, reason, senses, have free rein. "If we will not interfere with our thought, but will act entirely, we know the particular thing, and every thing and every man."<sup>9</sup> Simplicity is specified by total involvement or better perhaps, total commitment to nature.

Interference and partial activity--the counterparts to total commitment--shed considerable light on the demand for total involvement. Emerson intends his initial procedure to foster a return to spontaneous activity, whether cognitive, volitional etc. According to him, if one could set aside the interferences with or obstructions to spontaneity the intuitions would come almost all by themselves. He complains that insight is smothered as much by "too violent direction given by our will, as by too great negligence." He says: "We do not determine what we think. We only open our senses, clear away as we can all obstruction from the fact and suffer the intellect to see.--But the moment we cease to report and attempt to correct and contrive, it is not

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<sup>9</sup>Works, Vol. II, p. 280; cf. pp. 275-280. The ideal for true knowledge about reality for Emerson might be called the "concrete universal," the general known in and through the specific instance in on-going experience.



truth."<sup>10</sup> He expressed the same idea in "Spiritual Laws." If a man says and does what strictly belongs to him nature will never leave him to intellectual obstructions and doubts. Our young people are diseased with problems which never were of practical difficulty to anyone who didn't go out of his way to find them--such problems as original sin, the origin of evil, predestination and the like. "A simple mind will not know these enemies," but will live by firm integrity. (Emerson casts the same aspersions on much of academic and professional education.) We must simply avoid vitiating nature by the interference of our will. Instead, we must obey--i.e., rest secure in our spontaneous acts. "Only in our easy, simple, spontaneous actions are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine." The basis for this surrender to nature is nature itself. "The whole course of things goes to teach us faith. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word."<sup>11</sup>

The interference of the will thwarts spontaneity; self-surrender promotes it. Yet this obedient surrender must not be misread as a cancelling out of the use of will.

I say, do not choose; but that is a figure of speech by which I would distinguish what is commonly called choice among men, and which is a partial act, the choice of the hands, of the eyes, of the appetites, and not a whole act of the man. But that which I call right or goodness, is the choice of my constitution.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 328.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 133-139.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 140. Italics under "partial act" are mine.

The will act obstructs spontaneity if and only if the good which elicits the choice is a partiality of man--exclusive preference for intellectual pursuits, bodily pleasures, or whatever; only that will act which Emerson calls the whole act of man--which chooses the good according to the promptings of man's constitution--invites a free flow of spontaneous action. The meaning and importance of "partial" and "total act" now becomes plain. Total action involves all the functions of the human constitution properly integrated (in spontaneous action); partial actions involve erroneous choice favoring one or another function as if that selected were supreme. Total action is action of the man prompted by the features of his constitution as an integral whole, and responding by his own directionality to the rest of nature. Partial actions obstruct the natural directionality. As Emerson remarks, what we usually call man, i.e., the eating, drinking, planting man is a misrepresentation. Spirit, or soul--the fully related integrated constitution of man directing himself--that is the man. It is the soul we truly respect, "would he man let it appear through his [total] action."

Partial acts invariably have paralyzing effects.

The blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us--in other words to engage us to obey.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 271. "Something of himself"--i.e., when the will decides to make its own destiny impervious to the natural directionality in the man's nature.

By contrast total action, i.e., the natural, full function of soul, "when it breathes through his intellect it is genius, when it breathes through his will, it is virtue, when it flows through his affection it is love."<sup>14</sup> Genius, virtue, and love are the three foremost expressions of the natural life-style once achieved, expressions incidentally which frequently tie into the "youth metaphor."

In summary, the "youth metaphor" unveils several important features of simplicity. First, cultivation of simplicity aims at putting into action and language no more and no less than experience yields. As Nature relates,<sup>15</sup> simplicity is a love of truth and a desire to communicate it without loss. Loss occurs when a person is possessed by any desire except for truth--for instance, for riches, fame or generally what Emerson refers to as the cowardice of being ignorant. Ignorance includes any form of self deception in which some value is placed above truth. Ignorance is cowardice simply because continually to seek and to face facts requires heroic self-discipline, whereas to make any other value supreme does not.<sup>16</sup> In short, simplicity requires man to try as far as possible to regain the uninhibited, unself-conscious, innocent vision of youth.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 26-31.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 293-294; 103-104; Vol. I, p. 104.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 8-9; Vol. II, pp. 273-274; Vol. III, pp. 275-279.

Furthermore simplicity, purity or innocence is not primarily an intellectual attitude--it is more than that, it is a life-style. The simple, the pure, the innocent let the facts carry them to their course of action.

What is the doctrine of infallible guidance if one will abdicate choice, but the striving to act unconsciously, to resume the simplicity of childhood? It is so to act on the last impression from a knowledge of all the facts and not wilfully to secure a particular advantage. The single-minded actor insists on the tranquility of his own mind.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, simplicity is the attitude by which one places himself in the right order of action. The end of the procedure is not a system of truths but a better man--and hopefully a morally improved society.

Lastly simplicity is reached through a dual effort. On the one hand, an individual must begin by setting aside the judgments about man and the world made by society--i.e., those which reflect the social mores, formal education, the arts, philosophy, religion--then he will be able to judge for himself what is true about man and his world. On the other hand, man must wholly surrender to living. Hence Emerson's insistent return to expressions such as "human activity," "total or partial action," to pinpoint the locus of truth for man. Simplicity demands total involvement. A person may not surrender only one or another side of himself to spontaneous behavior but every side; he may not dictate that, to procure his individual and personal desires,

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<sup>18</sup> JMN, Vol. IV, p. 318; Works, Vol. II, pp. 328-329.

one or another side should dominate his life-style. The proper relations should spring up out of the natural directionalities in concrete actual situations.

Of course, simplicity is an ideal. An individual's hold on it admits of degrees. On the factual level simplicity is reliable but always open to further development. Integrity and selfishness do continual battle. The simple person thus strives daily to further purify his intentions. As we have already seen, the best environment in which to recover simplicity is in nature itself, where, away from the distractions and inhibiting forces of society, one might feel the relaxing goodness of an immediate relation to nature. The proud, the selfish, the cowardly--but not the lowly--will miss the primary value of this relation in man's life. The value is life-supporting truth.

### Simplicity as an Assumption

Simplicity aims at the suspension of unwarranted assumptions and at a turn to total reliance on nature. But Emerson's high trust of nature is itself a rather fundamental assumption. On what did he base this assumption? The following section concerns this question. First we will consider in general the grounding of fundamental beliefs, and next specifically Emerson's way of grounding his belief in the reliability of nature. Support for a basic belief about the world does not come as much from arguments within a system of thought as from the fruitfulness of the belief within a given life-style. Such was the case

regarding Emerson's fundamental belief in nature. For him the appropriateness of trust in nature rested on the fruitfulness of this belief in living. Inattention to the way he grounded his trust in nature has given rise to the mistaken notion that his optimism resulted instead from an inability to admit seriously the presence of evil in the world. The final section of the chapter will comment on his supposed dewy-eyed optimism.

### Basic Belief in General

The creation of any procedure for describing the world must minimally lean on some assumptions about the reliability of the world in general and about man's faculties in particular, since to construct a valid method already supposes the mind capable of judging the validity of a method. Furthermore, if one supposes the reliability of human intelligence to make such judgments and if, moreover, one asserts that a given method actually suits existing states of affairs, then one must lean also on the assumption that these states of affairs are trustworthy enough, stable enough, to permit the assertion. Without some stability it becomes pointless to claim any method applies.

As a matter of fact we hold all sorts of notions as true without challenge, notions received from our culture and which our experience over a period of time supports. Only when they come in conflict with other and more basic truths do we begin to doubt them. As Bertrand Russell remarks, "Wherever we feel initial certainty, we require an argument to make us doubt, not

an argument to make us believe."<sup>19</sup> In other words the proper frame of mind in which to begin philosophizing is to accept convictions and principles to the extent they do not give occasion to doubt them.

Granting that we begin by accepting many principles at hand, the larger issue is whether the principles, especially fundamental ones can be justified. In one sense justification for first principles about a man's world-view cannot be given, if justification means to give speculative reasons which validate or verify the principles. First principles are belief-statements and hence do not call for speculative verification. They express more the speaker's acceptance of a point of view as basic than that these statements are true or false. But in another way they can be supported.

William James' study of belief is helpful. According to him most of the time sound intellectual reasons direct our choices. Still when it comes to genuine options<sup>20</sup> regarding fundamental beliefs we seem to have no good reasons for our

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<sup>19</sup>Bertrand Russell, An Outline of Philosophy, Meridian Books (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 174.

<sup>20</sup>James, The Will to Believe and Other Essays (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), pp. 2-4. (Hereinafter referred to as The Will to Believe.) An option is genuine when a) living, b) forced and c) momentous. An option is living according to the degree of willingness to act on it; forced when "there is no standing place outside the alternatives," e.g., "Either accept this truth or go without it."; momentous when it offers a unique opportunity, the stake significant, the decision unalterable--i.e., ideas are in an unalterable relation to the situation either for or against it. Example: a trip into outer space.

choice. Rather the reasons are defensible only within the ongoing lived-situation. We will our choice. A case in point. "Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other." The will to believe, James holds, is a normal element in making up one's mind. When an option cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, a man must decide by his "passional nature." For "'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision--just like deciding 'yes' or 'no' and is attended by the same risk of losing truth." In either case we act, we choose.<sup>21</sup>

What then of the options between a trust of nature and scepticism? Nodding to Emerson, James states that logic can neither prove nor refute either intellectual or moral scepticism. "When we stick to it that there is truth (be it of either kind), we do so with our whole nature, and resolve to stand or fall by the results." No argument can prove whether he or the sceptic will have at last taken the wiser stand.

But his choice is still defensible. He maintains that from his perspective experience itself seems to suggest goodness and trustworthiness. If this life is not a real fight in which we gain some lasting success for the universe, then life is no better than a private little play from which one may withdraw at will. "But it feels like a fight--as if there were something wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 9, 11, 19, 31.



faithfulness, are needed to redeem."<sup>22</sup>

The sense in which basic beliefs are defensible is clarified by Carnap's discussion about the "external question." Carnap suggests that to ask whether x is real or not is to ask whether x is an element within a given system, (internal question). Means at hand exist by which to answer this question within a system--by some means of verification or by some logical principle. It is inappropriate however, to ask such a speculative question about a system as a whole, (external question). In this case the word 'real' cannot meaningfully be used because 'real' arises as a term employed in response to questions where there are on hand the means within the system for answering such questions. But there is no similar means by which to raise speculatively either the question or its answer outside the system. Instead, Carnap proposes, when an individual asks whether "x is real" as an external question, what he means to ask is whether "x is suitable to his own basic point of view about the world." Or more precisely it is to ask a practical question regarding the fruitfulness of adopting x as his own framework or as a feature of his framework, as the case may be. Thus when a person states that "x is the case," he may be answering the internal question affirmatively, viz., "x is an element within my system, as has been established by the proper means of verification or logical principle;" or he may be responding to the external

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

question affirmatively, viz., "acceptance of x as a totality has fruitful consequences for me, as practical testing has established." The latter is a belief statement. It reflects some justification but not speculative.

Applied to first principles, there is no way within the system to verify or establish first principles since the system itself including acceptable norms for verification and justification depends on them. To ask whether these principles are real, therefore, cannot be an internal question. I wish to maintain that the appropriate means to establish them is pragmatic--i.e., one must test them in terms of their range of fruitfulness for his life-style.<sup>23</sup>

My purpose in interjecting these summary remarks about basic assumptions has been not to make my own act of personal belief regarding them but to clear an opening in which we might more readily sit down to a discussion of Emerson's way of supporting his choice of first principles.

### Emerson's Grounding of Trust in Nature

Emerson maintains that we begin by believing and require definite arguments to reject a belief, especially as regards our fundamental assumption about the reliability of nature and of man within it. The "youth metaphor" serves us again. For we

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<sup>23</sup>Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," pp. 178-193, in Contemporary Readings in Logical Theory, ed. by Irving M. Copi and James A. Gould (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

have seen that the child, the innocent youth, accepts the day as it comes to him. He simply trusts nature. The youth's assumptions are derived from his on-going experience which have generally sustained him; he has little store of past experience or social conditioning which would close definitively many future possibilities. By Emerson's standard a position loses credibility if it does not aid man to live more satisfactorily, for it does not fit into the range of human importance.

He insisted that man ought to begin by trusting nature. We need call up only a few examples. Nature opens with the forthright complaint that the present age spends too much of its energies mulling over the bones of past generations. Each prior generation beheld nature face to face. Why then should we masquerade in their faded wardrobe?

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth.<sup>24</sup>

Each man must find truth for himself or go without it. Truth comes by genuine living, by self-reliance, self-surrender.

Three years after Nature he wrote that the true fall of man came when he held himself in disesteem. Self-trust, however, is man's redemption.<sup>25</sup> In an 1844 lecture we read, "We shall

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<sup>24</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup>Rusk, Letters, Vol. II, p. 213.

rely on the Law alive and beautiful which works over our heads and under our feet. Pitiless it avails itself of our success when we obey it and of our ruin when we contravene it." All men secretly believe in it. "They believe that the best is the true; that right is done at last; or chaos would come."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, he throws this challenge at himself--"Believe that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect and what we are, that only we see."<sup>27</sup>

Emerson believed that one had to trust totally because any other approach would make living impossible. He held with the Transcendentalists<sup>28</sup> that the most unassailable feature of experience is that man is alive, and that living itself urges the striving for continuance of life on levels far above the merely biological.<sup>29</sup> Any principle which blurs or opposes this fact, that is, which if followed through would reduce life or make it absurd, is not true. "This is a true account of our instinctive faith--simply that it is better in the view of the mind than any other way, therefore must be the true way. Whatever is better must be the truer way." What is better in the view of the mind?

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<sup>26</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 283.

<sup>27</sup>JMN, Vol. V, p. 182.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Brownson, "The Convert," p. 46; also Reed, "Observations on the Growth of the Mind," p. 54; also the remark in the second number of the Dial, that youth was not so much protesting the past as beginning to live in the present; p. 22, in The Transcendentalists, ed. by Miller.

<sup>29</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 64; p. 113.

"That is always best which gives me to myself."<sup>30</sup> "What gives me to myself" is another way of saying, "what enables me to live."

According to his criticism of established descriptions of man in his world, both sensism and idealism severed one or another aspect of man from his daily world, thus paradoxically rendering life on speculative grounds impossible. The best is what joins man together whole with this world so that he may be alive, healthy again. (One of Emerson's common themes was Piety restores man to Health.) We should recall an earlier passage, that all men secretly believe the best is true "or else chaos would come." In another place he warns that as soon as I suspect the reliability of nature "already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creeps over me, and I shall decrease forever."<sup>31</sup>

Emerson was not merely stating that man could no longer give speculative reasons for his conduct; he would simply not be able to act. He could not live. For the denial would involve man in a world where all states of affairs would move chaotically, including man himself. In a world of complete disorder--a dire dominion of chance, he calls it--life and specifically human life could not sustain itself. It made no sense to stand by theories of the world which if followed through would make living "an impossible curse."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> JMN, Vol. III, p. 317 (Jan., 1832); Works, Vol. I, pp. 131-132.

<sup>31</sup> Works, Vol. III, p. 283; Vol. I, pp. 131-132.

He recoiled from philosophies which held positions that made the ordinary world of daily experience paradoxical. Speculation could not run counter to the natural life-style. As the "youth metaphor" underscores, our living is the primary experience. Human living, its content and relations, are the unassailable facts. Statements which would make living impossible are false; only those which arise in the lived situation and which promote living are true. He was fond of stressing that the most abstract truth is the most practical.<sup>33</sup> Living rather than speculative arguments persuades man of his most basic beliefs. Emerson opted for trust in natural living, because only that belief seemed to promote human living.

### Emerson's Optimism

The quality of his optimism requires special comment. Common aphorism has it that he looked upon the world with the incautious, rosy-glassed eyes of youthful idealism, that his world was a bower of fairy-tale dreams, that he could not grow up enough to taste and admit the bitterness of a harsh but real world.<sup>34</sup>

William James comments that Emerson's

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<sup>32</sup>JMN, Vol. II, p. 6; p. 252.

<sup>33</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., James T. Adams, "Emerson Re-read," pp. 31-39; for an opposite view, cf., Ralph H. Gabriel, "Emerson and Thoreau," pp. 55-64, in The Transcendentalist Revolt Against Materialism, ed. George Whicher (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1949).

...optimism had nothing in common with that indiscriminate hurrahing for the Universe with which Walt Whitman has made us familiar. For Emerson, the individual fact and moment were indeed suffused with absolute radiance, but it was upon a condition that saved the situation--they must be worthy specimens--sincere, authentic, archetypal; they must have made connection with what he calls the moral Sentiment.<sup>35</sup>

This assessment is particularly noteworthy because James usually contrasts "optimism" with his own belief in "meliorism." By "meliorism" he meant the view that the world improves only by generous involvement and trust on man's part. "Optimism" was untenable because it suggested a world at its very best now, needless of the additions of human effort. But evidently James found Emerson's breed of optimism closer to his own thinking. Rightly so. The picture of Emerson as incurably, overly optimistic was originated largely by the fancy of the New England Victorian mood coming after his death, which seemed to be in search for a clean sexless American gentleman hero who would not embarrass the public mores of the day.<sup>36</sup>

The fact is, Emerson's years saw many dismal clouds. His childhood was hard because of the early passing of the man of the household. Calvinist rearing, according to his biographer, Rusk, was severe.<sup>37</sup> Yet when he went off to college, he was almost heady with the prospects he dreamed of ahead of him. But

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<sup>35</sup> James, "Address at the Emerson Centenary in Concord," p. 22, in Critical Essays, ed. by Konvitz and Whicher.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. JMN, Vol. I, pp. xiii, et seq.

<sup>37</sup> Rusk, Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 55.

as his journals show, the more he studied the less sure of his destiny he became. The Humeian crisis almost overcame him.<sup>38</sup>

As he began to rebuild his hopes during the earliest most promising years as a minister, his frail wife of deepest romantic attachment passed away. The very next year he found he had to set aside regular Christian ministry. His trip to Europe did rekindle his confidence again. We have seen that there he resolved upon his own philosophical posture. But it cost him his hero worship for his European mentors. Home again, soon after in 1834 his brother Edward with whom he was very close died--leaving Ralph Waldo stunned. But remarriage seemed to straighten him (1935). Again however, death struck, this time his brother Charles. The birth of Ralph's first child, Waldo, sparked his enthusiasm once more.<sup>39</sup> In January, 1842, the child died at five years of age.

Nor did he turn his eyes away from the deep social difficulties which were plaguing the nation. He was associated with the Transcendentalists and could scarcely have avoided contact with these troubles. Most members of the intellectual community in which he held active voice were dedicated to some type of social reform. Names such as Horace Greeley, Sumner, Garrison, Dorothea Dix, Horace Mann, even John Brown, come to mind. Closer to home Theodore Parker, also a social reformer and conscience

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<sup>38</sup>JMN, Vol. II, pp. xi-xiv.

<sup>39</sup>Rusk, Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 230-232.



of the Congress, was Emerson's friend. Brownson, enthusiastically received into the service of the Transcendentalists (for a relatively short while) was writing remarkably strong and incisive attacks against the exploitation of the laboring classes by their employers. Some of Emerson's writings express like criticisms. We have yet to mention the most excruciating social crisis of all--slavery and the Civil War. Emerson shared the haunting concern of the Transcendentalists over Negro slavery and the restless premonition of an impending Civil War. He can scarcely be accused of imperviousness to the bitter facts of human existence.

Yet he insisted on an optimistic stand. The American experience appeared to support it. Progress in materialities and in moral uprightness seemed to come to those who took their norms for conduct from natural living rather than from received traditions. Despite its problems America was in a unique position to offer that approach and those rewards to everyone. The possibility for American democracy to bring about the fullest development of man's capacities was largely taken to have already proven itself in the eyes of Emerson's American contemporaries. His friends made it a frequent subject of their journalism.

The same optimism burned in Emerson too. In the beginning paragraph of Nature, Emerson demands, why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and a religion revealed to us; why should we settle for a philosophy, a poetry, a religion,

that has come to us second-hand through history and traditions? "Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature," why grope diffidently in the past? "The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts."<sup>40</sup> The American Scholar proclaims: "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship, to the learning of other lands--draws to a close ..., Events, actions, arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age?" Confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs to the "American Scholar" because freedom teaches the true importance and force of the individual. When the American scholar recognizes his importance then "a nation of men will for the first time exist, because he believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."<sup>41</sup> The major force motivating him to hold to a reliance on man and trust of nature in general was that the American experience supported it. Where men could follow the promptings of their intrinsic makeup, and unfettered by social institutions distrustful of nature men could deal directly with their environment, there they would prosper most.

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<sup>40</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82; pp. 114-115.

### Conclusion and Résumé

In one sense no reasons--i.e., no speculative support--can ground a fundamental belief, we have also shown that in another sense practical reasons--reasons within lived-experience itself--can be mounted to endorse a genuine option. Two facts should now be clear regarding Emerson's understanding about his basic convictions. First of all, he regards these assumptions as a belief. He calls his optimism a belief, or instinctive faith, a primary faith.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the weight that secures his belief is pragmatic, though he does not strip the pragmatic of important speculative implications. His optimism suggests what James called a "genuine option." If trust in nature actually makes living a more valuable enterprise, then to that extent this belief has speculative importance. It indicates something positive about the actual states of affairs--"the best is true." Emerson's position is in the order of belief, but a belief which as its evidence within a particular life-style. He musters on its behalf that any other view would make living impossible.<sup>43</sup>

In résumé, this chapter first described the attitude of simplicity, the attempt to recover a life-style free from unwarranted assumptions. The effort required both removal of

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<sup>42</sup>E.g., JMN, Vol. V, p. 182; Works, Vol. III, p. 283; JMN, Vol. III, p. 317; Works, Vol. I, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup>"The soul refuses limits, and always affirms an Optimism, never a Pessimism." Only with that attitude can one live. Works, Vol. II, p. 122.

preconceptions, and total trust of natural living. Next came an examination of the support he brought to his own assumption that nature was trustworthy. In one way, within a system of thought, no convincing argument could be given for a fundamental belief such as this. In another way, his belief could be confirmed pragmatically, by the experience of living according to the belief. His optimism was tempered by his experience.

The aim of simplicity was to have man yield to spontaneous living, since only spontaneity would reveal a balanced, life-promoting approach to reality. In the next chapter we take up spontaneity, concentrating on its procedural dimension--on the means for verification which spontaneity yields.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPONTANEITY: THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING

Simplicity ushers in phase two of the procedure--spontaneity, full reliance on the promptings of natural living. The childlike man commits himself totally to the experience of living which then becomes the source for his beliefs about the world. It also offers him a reliable procedure by which to test the conformity of these beliefs to fact. This procedure is the topic of the present chapter. We find that the verification procedure not only arises out of but is the experience of living.

Emerson harbors no a priori reasons for holding that beliefs require a testing procedure of some sort. Yet that he finds one necessary marks the strength of his philosophy. He had deep misgivings about the assumption common among Transcendentalists that whatever passes as a spontaneous intuition may be trusted to reflect without further ado the actual state of affairs. It seems that he refused to join actively the Brook Farm<sup>1</sup> episode not because he was socially awkward, nor because

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<sup>1</sup>In 1841 a group gathered at Brook Farm to form a self-sustaining transcendentalist community, founded on the belief that if each individual performed those tasks he felt were most natural to him the association would flourish both intellectually and financially. Though invited, Emerson refused to join. A few years after its inception the association in its original form failed. Cf. George Hochfield, ed., Selected Writings of the

he regarded corporate high-mindedness with suspicion but because he recognized that the participants had not girded their good will for the fatal eventuality that their "intuitions" might at last conflict with those of the other participants. For they all believed that truth was one and that they were one in the truth. He hedged his enthusiasm with a procedure to insure against self-deception. In his eyes, a doctrine of intuition which overlooked this procedure would not have let nature speak for herself, or perhaps better, have allowed her full say.

Three principal tasks confront us. The first is to explore Emerson's meaning for 'the real'--his procedure for tests whether beliefs conform to reality having been tailored to fit the supposed stance of reality. The second is a twin task: to show he actually made natural living the test of truth and that the test involved a procedure. The third is to outline the norms and structure of that procedure, which as we shall see indicates an incipient pragmatism.

### Emerson's Notion of Being

The procedure for verifying beliefs about the world is to determine whether they actually relate to something real. It is important to specify Emerson's meaning for 'the real' or 'being' in order to determine the scope of the procedure. It must be broad enough to cover all general aspects of reality. He

equates 'being,' 'living,' 'evolving.' The procedure for verification will be to discover whether a given belief relates to vital qualities in experience, to a kind of evolution.

To be real, to exist, does not suggest the relation to time and space as modern philosophy commonly used the term, nor the "actus esse" of scholastic philosophy. Being subsumes the sensible and the ideal, as well as essence and existence. Emerson's theory of being runs a remarkable parallel to Hegel's.<sup>2</sup> To be real is to be whole, possessed of self-subsuming degrees. But it also differs from Hegel's in important ways. Hegel admits the aesthetic dimension of experience but makes the aesthetic subservient to Reason; Emerson insists that a philosopher who

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<sup>2</sup> Emerson was in touch with Hegelian thinking all through his career. Several of his associates--George Bancroft, F. H. Hedge, and later Theodore Parker--were conversant with Hegel's writings in German. Bancroft, for a while, even attended Hegel's Berlin lectures. Emerson also knew the St. Louis Hegelian, W. T. Harris even contributing articles to Harris' Journal of Speculative Philosophy. Through this acquaintance he possibly had access to Harris' translations of Hegel, and his "Outlines" of Hegel's works. Emerson's philosophy was well formed when around 1850 he began serious study of Hegel. He gave closest attention to The Philosophy of Art, and The Lectures on the Philosophy of History. Cf. listing in Harding's Emerson's Library. But he found Hegel too abstract, preferring instead to glean Hegel's notions from works by his followers--those by Victor Cousin, for instance. The book which, perhaps opened Hegel's thoughts most to Emerson was The General Principles of Nature (1848), by the American Hegelian, John Stallo. Loyd D. Easton, Hegel's First American Followers (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1966), pp. 4-9; pp. 43-49.

Cousin, 1792-1867, a French popularizer of Hegel, was a rather eclectic philosopher who tried synthesizing Kantianism and German Romanticism with Scottish Common Sensism, to provide a rational basis to the contingent propositions of science and the absolute of morals and religion. Cf. Joseph L. Blau, Men and Movements in American Philosophy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952), p. 18.

subordinates the aesthetic to the rational in his over-all description of being will end up with an unbalanced, intellectualistic philosophy. He holds that even Plato succumbed to the temptation to overemphasize the rational. The result was a closed and completed description of being. The philosopher's quest for unity leads him to ignore the equally present and important features of multiplicity and evolution in his over-all description of being. Hegel is susceptible to that charge too, as Dewey would later specifically point out.<sup>3</sup> For Emerson, however, being is in principle open-ended, having no final completed phase.

'Being,' 'Living,' 'Evolving' Equated

'The real' or 'being' first of all signifies life. On the one hand being is identified with the good and positive, while on the other, non-being is identified with evil and negation. Just as being means good, so good means life.

Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute...All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he.<sup>4</sup>

Since being is the good, and the good is what has life, being is what has life. In the "Poet" he relates: "That will reconcile me to life and renovate nature, to see trifles animated by a

<sup>3</sup>Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, enlarged edition (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948), p. 106; Art as Experience, Capricorn Books (New York: P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 289.

<sup>4</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 124.



tendency, and to know what I am doing." He calls this "the science of the real,"<sup>5</sup> meaning that by contact with the real a person has the power of life.

Being also means the developmental, the evolving. Emerson pictures the cosmos as an organism endowed with being, life, directionality by its soul. He distinguishes two views of the world. Understanding sees all changes as ever-recurring movements between opposites. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. For every evil, an equal and opposite good and vice versa. Circumstances eventually balance themselves according to an inescapable leveling justice. Change is repetitious, nothing new happens in the long run. But Understanding deals with appearances, the surfaces of life. Reason on the contrary, recognizing a deeper fact than repetition, viz., unreversed creative development, has the true grasp of reality, life itself. Life fundamentally is

...the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation...Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same.<sup>6</sup>

Vice, since it is non-being, "Nothing, Falsehood," can beget no fact nor "can it work for it is not." Only being can do anything.

The activities of being are necessarily creative, involving

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 120-121.

the achievement of new phases of life.<sup>7</sup> For creativity is just another term for living or being. He comments that at times man is conscious in himself of a "life above life in infinite degrees." This 'unbounded substance' has had such inadequate titles as "Fate, Minerva, Muse, Holy Ghost," which were meant to convey the notion of creative directionality. But "in our more correct writing we give to this generalization the name of Being, and thereby confess that we have arrived as far as we can go."<sup>8</sup>

In their fullest sense being, goodness, life and creativity apply to God. Man insofar as he is good, i.e., truly lives, shares in the being of God. To the extent man betters himself--lives according to his nature--he is. As Emerson says, the deepest fact in the soul is its own nature. It is a life; it is. The law of the soul is growth, the enlargement of life proper to man. It is present in man in degrees.<sup>9</sup> The more an individual shares in the power of the soul the more real he is. Thus one may according to strict usage say that man is in the process of realizing<sup>10</sup> himself; man gradually opens himself to an ever fuller reception of being.

Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-124. The "novelty" aspect of life or being will be explained later.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 122.

<sup>10</sup>"Genius realizes and adds." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 11.

which it enters into all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain.<sup>11</sup>

Emerson could state that wisdom and virtue are proper additions of being. "In a virtuous act I properly am....There is no tax on the good of virtue, for that is the incoming of God himself or absolute existence." I am my "soul"--I am to the degree the divine Soul (Being) can extend itself in me.<sup>12</sup>

His was not a spectator-view of reality. The soul manifests itself to man not so much by giving man answers in words but by becoming him whom it enlightens, i.e., by giving man's actions their direction. Emerson considered this manifestation the highest event in nature. It was this sort of manifestation he called "Revelation," a surge of divine goodness and intelligence in man's actions.<sup>13</sup>

Placed in its social context Emerson's thinking on the soul takes on added meaning. Early New England theologians could not understand how in a society individual men could be both free and yet morally upright. Human nature was depraved. Left to its own devices it would tend to evil. In the covenant of the Redemption God agreed to direct society toward the good, but only through its leaders. But in Emerson's day, many younger Americans, including Emerson, argued that since God created all

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup>This explains what he means by, "That is best which gives me to myself." Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 185, 124, 122.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 280-281. Note how once more he relates living, virtue, being.

natures (i.e., intrinsic constitutions of things) and directs all things according to their natures, the directionalities of one's nature must be good. Therefore, the freer men could be to follow this natural directionality in their own lives--the more they let God direct them--the more morally upright they would become. Democracy was to bring about a New Eden and a nation of New Adams.<sup>14</sup>

All beings share in divine Being. To do so is to share in the divine life of the Soul which is ceaselessly creative. Hence all beings have some degree of creativity, manifesting itself as an evolutionary process. 'To be,' therefore, means not only 'to live' but in some sense 'to evolve.' Clarification of his notion of evolution sheds light on his notion of being. As study of his sources and writings reveals, evolution is the progression to ever higher degrees of self-fulfilling relations with the rest of nature--each stage with an aspect continuous with the past and yet with another aspect better and entirely new in nature.

#### Sources Influencing His View of Evolution

A great variety of sources influenced Emerson's evolutionary theory of nature. Actually he was quite slow in adopting it.

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. R.L.B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 1-10. "The face of character is cumulative...That is it which throws thunder into Chatham's voice, and dignity into Washington's port, and America into Adam's eye." Emerson, Works, Vol. II, pp. 59-60.

In college the idea of growth and progress was widely discussed, both inside and outside of class.<sup>15</sup> From the early 1820's to 1835 especially, while he engaged in a rather informal but serious dialectic about it he read several philosophers for help, among them Plato and Plotinus. Though he rejected both--Plato because he took the relations between forms to be static rather than dynamic or organic;<sup>16</sup> Plotinus because his doctrine of emanation seemed to render the material side of experience insignificant, not to say, unreal--he still found evolution difficult to accept.<sup>17</sup>

His remedial trip to Europe in 1833 settled him into a more sympathetic reception of evolution. In Paris, he toured the "Botanical Garden," where specimens had been arranged according to structural similarities. He was fully aware at the time that Buffon and Lamarck had already made important discoveries there supporting evolution,<sup>18</sup> and he too was deeply struck by the order

<sup>15</sup>Emerson moved from one side of the debate to the other and back again, in an effort to examine its worth. Mildred Silver, "Emerson and the Idea of Progress," American Literature, XII (March, 1940), pp. 3-4.

<sup>16</sup>Johnathan Bishop, Emerson on the Soul (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 236, n. 18; cf. Richard P. Adams, "Emerson and the Organic Metaphor," PLMA, LXIX (March, 1954), pp. 117-130. Emerson more than any of the Transcendentalists exploited the idea of the organic metaphor--that nature is to be conceived of as a vital growing organism. Hochfield, Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists, p. xvii.

<sup>17</sup>Henry D. Gray, Emerson (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1917), pp. 44-45, 51.

<sup>18</sup>Lamarck greatly influenced him during the 1830's at the height of his search for a viable unifying theory of reality. He

suggested by the arrangement as his comments soon after reveal. Every form "is an expression of something in man the observer.... an occult relation between the very worm, the crawling scorpions and man."<sup>19</sup> In a lecture "Use of Natural History," given upon returning home, he declares:

...the system of La Marck aims to find a monad of organic life which shall be common to every animal, and which becomes...a mastiff or a man, according to circumstances. It says to the caterpillar 'How dost thou, Brother! Please God, you shall yet be a philosopher.'<sup>20</sup>

In 1835, he confesses "I cannot but think that mere enumeration of the objects would be found to be more than a catalogue;-- would be a symmetrical picture not designed by us but by our Maker,..."<sup>21</sup> He had become sympathetic to the theme of development but the clear recognition of the primary role of process in the scheme of evolution would be lacking until about 1840.

Nothing extensive has been done to answer why Emerson at last moved so certainly in favor of an evolutionary perspective.

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drew much of Lamark from Lyell's Principles of Geology. Though in Emerson's eyes a "mere catalogue of facts," it had the merit of depending for its theory on Lamark. Whicher suggests Lyell also had the special significance of showing him nature's movements in a time-perspective so vast that his initial optimism about its submission to human power required much modification. Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 146; Vivian C. Hopkins, Spires of Form (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 123.

<sup>19</sup>Rusk, Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 188-189; cf. JMN, Vol. IV, p. 406; Vol. V., p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>Rusk, ibid., JMN, V, p. 220.

<sup>21</sup>Rusk, ibid.

One good suggestion is simply that he saw the implications of a scientifically revealed universe and faced them squarely.<sup>22</sup> In brief, the scientific attitude declares that norms for dealing with experience should arise from experience itself. In Emerson's case the experience was the process of human living. Indeed "Circles" does read like a manifesto on behalf of the experimental method.<sup>23</sup> It is quite plausible his close attention to scientific thinking did most to convince him of the developmental quality of nature. He sustained life-long interest in the work of a number of scientists. With some--notably Richard Owen and Agassiz--he had first-hand acquaintance.<sup>24</sup>

Darwin's works were certainly among those he read.<sup>25</sup> But apparently Emerson had already settled on his own theory before Darwin's was published. In fact he seems to have been little influenced by Darwin's work. Darwin merely supported his philosophical conclusions with additional scientific facts.

Emerson's notion of evolution differs significantly from

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<sup>22</sup>Silver, "Emerson and the Idea of Progress," p. 1, n. 1; Eduard Lindeman, "Emerson's Pragmatic Mood," American Scholar, XVI (Winter, 1946-1947), pp. 59-60.

<sup>23</sup>"Emerson's ideal of the American scholar whose proper condition is 'man thinking' seems to have no more adequate embodiment than the scientist at work." Marx W. Wartofsky, Conceptual Foundations of Scientific Thought (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 410.

<sup>24</sup>Silver, "Emerson and the Idea of Progress," p. 13; Lindeman, "Emerson's Pragmatic Mood," pp. 59-60.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Stanley T. Williams, ed., "Unpublished Letters of Emerson," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXVI, pp. 477-478.

that of Darwin. For Emerson evolution is organized growth--not a process directed by chance natural selection and survival of the fittest. Moreover, Darwin was concerned only with biological species; Emerson, with human experience and nature as a whole. Evolution was more than the reconfiguration of basic particles--it was spiral, nature repeating the same process on different planes, each adaptation a step higher. Genuine growth took place at each ascent. Something qualitatively new happened at each ascent, something which no forms of nature previously could achieve.<sup>26</sup>

### Emerson's Notion of Evolution

Emerson's concept of evolution only insinuated itself in his earlier essays, as when for instance he asks regarding the American scholar:

What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicability of this web of God but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning whose ending, he can never find--so entire, so boundless.<sup>27</sup>

The passage suggests a working through of the Neo-Platonic theory of divine power returning to itself. But the groundwork for the breakthrough and his later thinking is present. Nature is an endless change; it also returns to itself. In what sense?

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<sup>26</sup>Hopkins, Spire of Form, p. 123; Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 141; Henry H. Clark, "Emerson and Science," Philosophical Quarterly, X (July, 1931), p. 241.

<sup>27</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 85.



First of all, the change which is a foremost mark of nature does not suggest constant overturn, upheaval, and reversal. "Nature is a certain self-regulated motion or change." Further, nature is "the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organizing itself." In the "return", the termini of change are laws and concretions--general laws and particular facts in the process of ever-further development. "Every ultimate fact is only the first in a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself."<sup>28</sup>

The way Emerson uses the word 'return' undergoes very subtle changes from essay to essay as he inches toward his evolutionary position. At first the "return" connotes some gradually developing identity between concrete instances and their changeless governing ideal type. In most of his later works each return of particulars is to a law which is itself developing, growing. No changeless laws underlie the growth of nature. In these essays, the "return" often evokes the image of a coming back to the divine creative source to imbibe once more new energies for further evolution. By about 1850 Emerson had abandoned what Beach calls "scale-of-being" theory of development in which "return" was a key function, and adopted a strictly evolutionary view in which "growth" took over the central role.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 22; Vol. II, p. 310, p. 304.

<sup>29</sup>Joseph Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 339.

The following passage from "Circles" exemplifies his full-bloom view.

There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid.<sup>30</sup>

Once again the contrast between Reason and Understanding comes into play. Understanding grasps "facts," which it considers absolute; Reason recognizes that no fact is ultimate and absolute. He confesses that if reason would not force itself on us from time to time, we would so easily and once for all adjust ourselves to live within those beautiful limits, "the perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect...[where] Manly...adherence to the multiplication table...will insure success."<sup>31</sup> But Reason does force itself on us at times. It is then we realize that "in nature every moment is new, the past always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit." No fact, no law is absolute and fixed. Every fact and indeed every law evolves. "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a series. Every general law is only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself."<sup>32</sup> The world is not a mass of disparate facts but a mass organized according to cease-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 302.

<sup>31</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 320-321; p. 304.

lessly evolving laws. Evolution, or ascension aims at lifting the soul to higher forms, to fuller degrees of self-realization together with the rest of nature.<sup>33</sup>

Bearing of 'To Evolve' on 'To Be'

His notion of being now becomes more definite. He equates being, living, evolving. Since 'to evolve' means to move through stages to ever higher degrees of self-fulfilment, 'to be' means to ascend through these stages. Applying this notion of being to his verification procedure, by simple identity the test of the relation of belief to reality will be a test for the relation of belief to what creatively advances into newer and higher forms.

Important to note, he identified being with evolving because in lived experience the evolutionary process seemed the balance point for the tensions between all the other factors in experience--unity and multiplicity, permanence and change, matter and spirit, etc. No description of a being could be real if one polar factor loomed larger than the rest, or if another dropped out of the picture entirely. For instance, to make unity the pivotal factor would eliminate multiplicity; to over-stress permanence might remove change. But if evolution became central, then all the other factors would be present and properly inter-related. Unified, all the polarities constitute what is,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 133; Vol. III, p. 24.

what evolves.

A second observation. According to the ordinary use of 'real,' 'living,' and we might add 'virtuous,' his language is odd, seeming to suggest that insofar as anything--man, beast or rock--is real it is living and virtuous. But animals are not generally thought of as virtuous nor rocks as living. The puzzle unravels with a closer look at the term 'life.' He intended to broaden its meaning even at the risk of blurring the classical distinction between life and non-life.

To be is to live. Just as to be is to share in divine Being, so to live is to share in divine Life. To be is to partake in the divine life of the Over-Soul. Moreover to be is to evolve. Since all beings share in divine Life they also share divine creativity, as divine life is creative. Creativity manifests itself in beings as growth, evolution. Emerson conceived the whole universe as a gigantic organism moving creatively through stages to ever higher forms. In its broadest meaning living and hence being suggests any organic evolution. The riddle--at least on the level of imagery--is thus solved. To be is to live, i.e., to come to ever fuller self-realizing power according to the divine prompting of the Over-Soul; to be is to be virtuous, i.e., to come to ever fuller self-realizing power, obedient to the Divine Will.

### The Verification Procedure

The verification procedure tests the relation between

belief and the real, the evolving. What constitutes the procedure? What are its norms and order? How does it arise? These are our next considerations. Natural living is the source for all knowledge of reality. It also provides the procedure for verification of beliefs. Put succinctly the process of verification is natural living. Beliefs are tested in actual life. Further, human living has norms and an order regularly operative which constitute the procedure for verification--one which suggests an incipient pragmatism. The following sections, after first touching on his pragmatism, aim at establishing that his process of verification was natural living and finally at uncovering the features of his procedure.

### The Pragmatism of His Approach

In his procedure for verification Emerson was in a broadly philosophical sense something of a pragmatist. Concrete actual living grounded all statements about reality; ideals served as instruments for an improved vitality. The degree of serviceability of beliefs marked the degree of their truth. Truth was reached experimentally.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Many writers, some if only on the way to another thought, have noted the experimental and experiential tone in Emerson. E.g., Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," pp. 24-30; Gray, Emerson, p. 33; Rusk, Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 237; Whicher, Freedom and Fate, p. 96, (though he thought it was a passing phase in Emerson.) Mildred Silver recognizes that Emerson had a marked tendency to test theory by practice--which, she observes, kept Emerson from joining in the socialist movements of Owen and Fourier, and specifically from actively entering into the Brook Farm venture. Silver, "Emerson and the Idea of Progress," pp. 16-17.

His stance on evolution already hinted at pragmatism. Recall the remark quoted before that every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series; that every general law is only a particular fact in relation to some more general law about to disclose itself. Evolution specified the sort of relation ideas have to experience--they relate to reality inasmuch as they contribute to the qualitative betterment of actual living. They are tested by the extent they may foster evolution. Moreover, since things in experience evolve, ideas about things in order to remain accurate descriptions of them require repeated returns to lived experience for adjustment. "The truest state, rested in, becomes false. Thought is manna which cannot be stored. It will become sour if kept, and tomorrow must be gathered anew." The manna image suggests that thought is to serve the present needs for living, nothing more. Playing on "East," "Orient" and "orientation" he continues: "Perpetually we must East ourselves or we get into irrecoverable error, starting from the plainest truth and keeping as we think the straightest road of logic."<sup>35</sup> It might at first seem startling to hear Emerson called an incipient pragmatist. Usually the so-called idealist strain in

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Lindeman notes that Emerson was caught up in two approaches to truth--the Transcendentalist, which he used at first to stimulate his critique of culture, and the pragmatic, his later procedure for testing ideas. Lindeman, "Emerson's Pragmatic Mood," pp. 57-64. Emerson did not have a pragmatic theory of meaning, however.

<sup>35</sup>JMN, Vol. V, p. 38 (1835); cf. Works, Vol. III, p. 237. For further study on Emerson and evolution, cf. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, pp. 336-343.

Emerson commands the reader's first attention. Unless prepared to give Emerson a closer look a second time around, one may understandably find it difficult to believe Emerson is pragmatic. After all, pragmatism and idealism are not thought to mix.

But we must not confuse New England idealism of the nineteenth century with European idealism, regardless of how much the first borrowed from the second. For New England Transcendentalists distinguished themselves emphatically from the Europeans on the grounds that the latter were not concerned seriously enough with the living out of ideals. Two centuries of North American puritanism, which maintained that superior beliefs had to usher in superior actions, was making itself felt.<sup>36</sup>

Admittedly the emphasis on practical follow-through need not entail an experimental or pragmatic outlook. On the other hand, in some sense, an idealist position need not preclude a pragmatic method. A basic tenet of idealism is that ideas are prior to our experience. In this sense the pragmatic and idealist approach might be mutually exclusive. But in another way they need not be. An idealist--a Romantic, for instance--might

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<sup>36</sup>Some measure of the way American transcendentalists looked at their idealism may be gleaned from Sampson Reed's "Observations on the Growth of the Mind"--which incidentally had great influence on young Emerson. "The best affections we possess will find their home in the objects around us....If the eye were turned inward to a direct contemplation of these affections, it would find them bereft of all their loveliness; for when they are active, it is not of them we are thinking, but of the objects on which they rest....The mind will see itself in what it loves and is able to accomplish. Its own works will be its mirror." Cited in The Transcendentalists, ed. Miller, p. 55.

insist that since the material world reflects the ideals hidden in man, man must engage in living to recover these a priori ideas in some sense of recover, a lift into consciousness, or reminiscence. The unique feature of a pragmatic test would be that only the actual range of fruitfulness and not logical ineluctability could guarantee that x or y were truly ideal. I do not wish to stand behind the merits of this approach but simply to point out its possibility. Josiah Royce took a position much like this.<sup>37</sup>

What I have said of the American Transcendentalists, I may say with still greater assurance of Emerson. For him it was a constant feature of his approach to test the truth of ideas about reality by pressing them into concrete use. Not that he was a full-blown pragmatist. That would be more properly reserved for those who claimed that designation, who made an explicit discipline of the pragmatic method, and who made a technical study of its philosophical dimensions. Emerson struggled to articulate some form of experimentalism. But as he was a pioneer, with no guide-posts to assure his path, he managed only to recognize the tool but not to focus fully on its wide-spread implications. His was an incipient pragmatism.

#### Natural Living, Source of the Procedure

Emerson maintained natural living was supposed to be the

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Max H. Fisch, ed., Classic American Philosophers (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), p. 27.



source of all true beliefs about the world and the test of their verification. His "American Scholar" expresses this view most clearly. The theory of books is noble, he says. Well used, books are the best of things; abused they are among the worst. "The scholar of the first age" received the world around him as life, as lived actions; upon what the primitive scholar received, he brooded. And what he grasped he expressed in ideas which, to the extent they captured the world satisfactorily, were important and long-lived. Ideas have creative force--insofar as they mirror life, they carry man to a higher plane of life.<sup>38</sup>

But the danger is this: "The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record."<sup>39</sup> Instead of prizing the creative force of ideas for their power to promote the quality of present vital activities men too often fall down before the ideas of the past and before books, the shrine of past ideas, as if there were about ideas severed from life something sacred and unimpeachable. No book, no body of ideas, however, perfectly and lastingly mirrors the world. Of course, with the scholar the life of action is subordinate but it is nonetheless essential.

Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth...The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious

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<sup>38</sup>"Good thoughts are no better than good dreams unless they be executed." Works, Vol. I, p. 37; cf. pp. 87-88.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived.<sup>40</sup>

Living serves the scholar in two ways. First, "If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary."<sup>41</sup> Language should reflect reality or life. Only those who face life for themselves can reflect it in language.<sup>42</sup> But more important, life also serves as the resource for further insights into living. "The mind now thinks, now acts and each fit reproduces the other." When the artist, for instance, exhausts his materials, when the scholar finds ideas no longer of service and the books tedious, "he has always the resources to live. Character is higher than intellect."<sup>43</sup> With the image of substance and accident before him he explains that living is the functionary, thinking only the function.

The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack the organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 98. "Words are signs of natural facts." Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>42</sup>"As I am, so I see; use what language we will we can never say anything but what we are." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 79. Italics mine--the notion of being will be explained later.

<sup>43</sup>"Character--a reserved force, which acts directly by presence and without means. It is conceived of as a certain unmonstrable force...by whose impulses the man is guided, but whose counsels he cannot impart." Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 89-90; Vol. I, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 99. Italics mine.

He remarks elsewhere of man's grasp of nature, "He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth."<sup>45</sup>

### The Process of Living

Broadly stated, the procedure for verification is the experience of living. But how does Emerson conceive the process of living? What are its elements and its relations? The answers reveal more about the procedure itself. At the same time, we ask these questions with the full realization that to atomize a concrete process runs the risk of reducing the actual process to the elements as they are considered in the analysis--abstract and unreal. Obviously we cannot make an abstract study of the elements of a process without analysis. There is nothing distortive about an abstract study as long as we bear in mind that only in actual relations in the concrete process are these elements real, that they are not each by themselves to be regarded as subsistent. Emerson himself regarded the unicity of the "initial relation" inviolable. "Life will be imaged, but cannot be divided or doubled. Any invasion of its unity would be chaos."<sup>46</sup>

The elements in the initial relation of living are three: man, environment, the relation of vital process. Man is an aspect of reality. He is living and aware of living. Further he

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 4. The passage resembles Dewey: "Things are had, before they are known."

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 78.

possesses given qualities whose relations and functions gradually disclose themselves through the process of living. Moreover, one feature of living for man is that he possesses a desire to preserve and promote those qualities which promise to yield his highest fulfilment. Emerson frequently emphasizes that "man's life is a progress, not a station."<sup>47</sup>

What we may call man's environment is the second aspect of the living process. "So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not possess." Emerson remarks, drawing undoubtedly on his college theme on Socrates, that the conflict between the ancient and modern precepts is at an end. "'Know thyself' and... 'Study nature,' become at last one maxim."<sup>48</sup> Only when actively engaged in his environment does man live and come to know truth.

Let us call "environment" whatever affects life. In Emerson's scheme it includes a plurality of things and persons which possess both structure and process. Anything can be environmental. Structural unities, causal nexus, principles of constancy and organization are operative in environment. On the level of Understanding, facts may appear to lack unity, direction and organization. But successful living following on belief in these factors belies that impression. Nature he commented once is the same and yet not the same, but it only reigns to contra-

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 87.

dict itself.<sup>49</sup>

The reality of the unified and stable in nature does not imply, however, the unreality of the material, diverse and changing in nature. He chides the schools of philosophy for sliding into the clutches of their occupational hazard, idealism. We tend to merge particulars under a single law, where the singular, the material, is lost. But life restores us to health since it insists on the reality of matter. Emerson coaxed those whose reverence for ideas made them queasy about his proposed alliance with material processes not to fear the new generalization. For if they think it degrades their ideas it also elevates their matter.<sup>50</sup>

The third feature of living is the concrete relation between man and his concrete situation--living itself. The process of living is the given "initial relation" between man and his environment. The organic living process of evolution, as we shall substantiate shortly, specifies exactly the type of primitive relation which exists between man and his world. It is a developmental process--one of "ascension" which takes place between man and his situation and in which both are constantly bettered.

#### Living, the Initial--Experiential--Relation

The process of living is man's "initial relation." His

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 85; Vol. II, p. 302; Vol. III, pp. 22, 181, 239.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 171; Vol. II, p. 306.

primary function is to live. The process is initial both chronologically and in order of ontological importance. An individual's earliest concern is for living; moreover only in acts of natural living is he directly involved in reality. Man responds to the many dimensions of his environment and escapes from the myopia of sensism and idealism only when his various powers--will, affections, senses, intellect--operate together as an integral unit. But his powers operate as an integral unit only in acts of natural spontaneous living. To borrow a term from Dewey, the process of living is man's primary experience--direct, active and conscious responsiveness within the concrete on-going environment.<sup>51</sup>

As a matter of terminology, Emerson rarely called the process of living 'experiential.'<sup>52</sup> More frequently he referred to

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<sup>51</sup>Primary as contrasted with reflective, secondary experience, which is abstract thinking about primary experience. Dewey intimates Emerson's resemblance to him on this point. Dewey, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in Critical Essays, pp. 25-26; cf. also Art as Experience, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup>Emerson does at times use 'experience' to convey the same meaning as 'intuition.' "So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vauquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford...to spare any action in which he can partake." Works, Vol. I, p. 95. In another place he relates that with a true friend we can for long hours "continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by...shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers." Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 192-193. The poet he describes as "...the person in whom these powers are in balance, the man without impediment, who sees and handles that which others dream of, traverses the whole scale of experience." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 6. But this usage is exceptional; usually he prefers the term 'intuition.'

it as 'intuitional.' But his preference was not to suggest a removal from the concrete order of the here and now. To explain, recall that in his view of first philosophy natural living was the exercise of Reason--a single unified act involving in duly proportionate order all the functions of man in concrete practical situations. Reason's direct perception of reality, termed 'intuition,' covered a very rich extension not intended to exclude the concrete and singular. Intuition included not only what man does, endures, strives for, but also how he acts, endures, believes, etc. Further it recognized no division between act and material, subject and object. It grasped nature, of which man and the rest of his world are aspects. Finally intuition was primarily esthetic and action-oriented--including the enjoying and enduring of objects--and was secondarily cognitively significant. It meant the human living of every-day life.<sup>53</sup>

He had a special design in preferring 'intuition' to 'experience.' He had rejected the sensism of Locke and Hume, both of whom believed the sensible manifold to be atomic. The meaning attached to 'experience' gained currency through them. So to adopt this term would have been to invite confusing his thought with sensism.

On the other hand the meaning of 'intuition' popularized by the Romantics came much closer to his own view. It suggested a

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<sup>53</sup>John Dewey, Experience and Nature (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 39; "Ralph Waldo Emerson" in Critical Essays, pp. 26-28.

unified relation between man as a whole and his concrete environment. It also occurred only in spontaneous actions. Emerson accepted their term but consistent with his critique of Romanticism he also modified the term to stress the primacy of actual commitment to the concrete directionalities of natural living. His notion of intuition was in no way supra-empirical.

His conception of the process of living gives basic shape to his verification procedure. First, spontaneous living is a direct conscious relation between man and his environment. Further, spontaneous living arouses beliefs about the various dimensions of reality--the material, spiritual, stable, changing, etc. Moreover these beliefs are for living, i.e., for promoting the positive qualities of life. As a consequence these beliefs are tested and modified by actually living according to them.

### The Process of Living and the Verification Procedure

The testing of beliefs is not a random process; it involves a procedure, some order and standards. As to be expected Emerson devotes little of his writings to the technical analysis of the procedure as such. Typically his direct concern for concrete instances of belief mantles the presence of the factors and structure of the procedure. Yet they do function clearly enough in the resolving of his concerns to make explicit treatment of them possible.

Our study of his conception of living has brought some of the procedure to the surface already. But several factors need



special attention. Contribution to 'organic evolution' or 'ascension' is the test for true belief. Though these terms have been considered earlier they demand further discussion in the context of the procedure. Second, the special sentiment by which a person detects the actual occurrence of ascension, and next, the role of community in the verification procedure require investigation. Finally, a note of explanation about the self-reformatory quality of true belief.

### Basic Outline of the Verification Procedure

Much of the procedure may be gleaned from previous discussion. In outline, once man surrenders to nature he discovers that human intelligence is the means by which to adjust to changing situations and by which to improve the quality of life. The products of the mind--ideas, statements--have as their function and hence as their claim to be the instruments by which to achieve improvement of vital activity. The extent of their fruitfulness in actual living is the measure of their truth.

There is a correspondence between the human soul and ...everything that is known to man. Instead of studying things without the principles of them all may be penetrated unto within him. Every act puts the agent in a new condition. The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint a man with himself. He is not to live a future as described to him but to live to the real future by living in the real present.<sup>54</sup>

Or again: "The great impression which a doctrine makes on us,

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<sup>54</sup> JMN, Vol. IV, p. 84.

I think is the test of its truth. If it frees and enlarges--if it helps me, then it is true; and not otherwise."<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, human intelligence provides this life-promoting function only when engaged in concrete life activities. Only then is intelligence unified with the total man and his surroundings. The intellect is anterior to any division of function--"it melts will into perception, knowledge into act."<sup>56</sup> Only on the level of concrete activities does the intellect experientially grasp things as they are, as organic, evolving continuities of structure.

Lastly living not only requires that living itself be the test of ideas but also that all ideas be returned time and again to living for further reformations. Otherwise, their claim to truth ceases. (One need only recall Emerson's likening of ideas to manna which each day must be gathered anew.) We have here, in nugget form Emerson's philosophical procedure as living itself, our primary experience, reveals it.

The test of actual improvement consists in noting that a statement serves in the way it, as an instrument, claims to--viz., as a means for issuance into concrete vital activity which, according to a standard of satisfaction, one regards as truly a qualitative betterment. But a number of specific questions about the procedure present themselves. What does 'qualitative better-

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<sup>55</sup>Rusk, Letters, Vol. III, p. 77 (1842).

<sup>56</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 325.

ment' mean; how do we know that qualitative betterment has taken place in any given concrete instance; what makes the means for discovering its presence reliable--and just how reliable are the means? First, the meaning of qualitative betterment.

### Notion of 'Ascension'

Qualitative betterment is another term for 'ascension,' 'elevation' or 'novelty.' Novelty is the general and pervasive feature of all nature. "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten: the coming only is sacred."<sup>57</sup> Further, we may remember that the novel is beyond prediction.<sup>58</sup> Novelty should not be taken to signify upheaval or chaos but progressive development. "Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit." Life, which he envisions as the energizing spirit in nature, is developmental. The movements of nature from one elevation to the next take place "without shock or leap."<sup>59</sup>

A basic Emersonian thesis is that what is so for nature in general is so as well for man as part of it. Since nature grows, develops, ascends, so does man. "Nature has a higher end, in the production of new individuals, than security, namely ascension, or the passage of the soul into higher forms." As he proclaims,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 319-320.

<sup>58</sup>Cf., e.g., ibid., Vol. III, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 319-320; Vol. III, p. 179.

"Life only avails, not having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from the past to the new state."<sup>60</sup> Living, hence being, involves continuous movement to a higher state.

The poet, incidentally, holds high office in this scheme because the poet recognizes and expresses the primacy of ascension, discerns the possibilities of ascension, and alerts the eyes of his generation to its presence. He "perceives that within the form of every creature is a force impelling it to ascend into a higher form."<sup>61</sup> The poet attempts to display in words the beauty of people and things. Emerson says the poet perceives the force of ascension. Ascension is the mark of the natural act. Its upward movement is graceful, beautiful. Thus Emerson's equation of the natural, the beautiful and the real. Man's natural, graceful actions are called virtues. By growth in virtue, man lives or is. Natural man, the virtuous man, alone is graceful and beautiful.

Each ascension, which takes place in all nature, and in a special way in and through man, effects a new condition in which man finds himself lifted to an entirely new relation to all aspects of nature which affect him. Hence, Emerson's "law of laws:"

The simple rise as by specific levity not into a particular virtue, but into the region of all virtues. They

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 24; Vol. II, p. 69; q.v. as a capsule of Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 20; Vol. II, p. 312.

are in the spirit which contains them all. The soul requires purity, but purity is not it; requires justice and is not that; requires beneficence, but is something better.<sup>62</sup>

As this passage indicates, the sort of betterment man finds most fulfilling is virtuous living. Emerson here wishes to explain that moral life does not lead an individual on a sort of scavenger hunt for virtues to be collected, here and there, helter-skelter--nor even to be steadily collected one after another. Instead moral life directs him into a steadily increased possession of an overall power to elevate corners of his life together.<sup>63</sup>

After its own law and not by arithmetic is the rate of the [soul's] progress to be computed. The soul's advances are not made by gradation, such as can be represented by motion in a straight line, but rather by ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphoses.<sup>64</sup>

But full virtue is not reached as if by a single metamorphosis. Emerson explains that "the search after truth is always by approximation." At first we have but an "instinctive perception of the value of certain ideas." By testing them in action we discover the extent of their value, the extent of their truth. But while each act places us in a new condition, each also has "some falsehood of exaggeration in it."<sup>65</sup> By Reason or intuition

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 275.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 121; Vol. II, p. 280, et seq.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 274.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 143; Rusk, Letters, Vol. I, p. 181 (1826); Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 185.

a person must continually reassess the instrumentality of ideas, discovering a new perspective that will lift him to a still more satisfactory plane of existence. It is in this sense he means "to make habitually a new estimate--that is elevation." Within lived experience some qualities are of positive, some of negative value. The soul draws upon those of positive value in order to conserve and promote the positive qualities of experience. And it is in this developed sense that Emerson uses elevation, novelty and ascension, for evolution.

#### Means for Discovering Ascension

But the most crucial issue is how to detect genuine ascension. What standard decides whether and to what extent an ascension truly has been affected by a belief having been implemented in lived experience? From what we have seen of the procedure so far, the simple man finds various ideas or principles arising in him spontaneously in his daily life. To consider them properly he must regard these principles not abstractly but concretely--as actually directing a particular activity here and now. On this level ideas are judged to be true insofar as man finds them (in the activity they effect) to be self-fulfilling, or satisfying. According to Emerson man knows the extent to which a principle satisfies by means of a sentiment of approbation that arises in the presence of the ideas as related to the concrete.<sup>66</sup> Basically this sentiment indicates self-fulfilment,

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 121-122; 126.

satisfaction. By this sentiment man feels that a particular pursuit fulfills him--not just for instance as a farmer or as a scholar but as a man. In the presence of this sentiment he feels that total dedication to a certain line of action will assure him his fullest and highest happiness, the fullest freedom to live, to be.

The "Divinity School Address" and "The Over-Soul" give the most extended treatment of the sentiment of approbation. Since the subject matter of those essays is God and our mode of behavior toward him, the slant on the topic of the sentiment will be specifically moral and religious. Still we can manage to pick out the general features involved.

Reminiscent of Johnathan Edwards, Emerson tells us the sentiment is one of delight, reverence, and awe, in the presence of certain divine laws.<sup>67</sup> These laws are those principles which in fact effect ascension. Initially an individual may regard these laws solely on a physical plane; at a later stage of development he discovers them to have moral and religious dimensions as well. The sentiment governs all elevations of reality, at first only physical but at advanced stages, spiritual--moral and religious--also.<sup>68</sup>

Delight, reverence and awe imply an enthusiasm for the principle or law under consideration--where enthusiasm means a

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 121; Vol. II, p. 281.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 121-122; 126; Vol. II, p. 275.

feeling of whole-hearted trust and commitment to the effectiveness of the principle. The delight indicates to the individual his fullest happiness or beatitude. Reverence and awe suggest total self-surrender to the object of beatitude. Here enthusiasm is the synonym. But the basis for the awe, the delight, the enthusiasm, is the feeling that now man has reached the height of the exercise of his abilities. "This sentiment...is the beatitude of man. It makes him illimitable."<sup>69</sup> What men seek in beatitude is the energy of full self-realization.

This energy does not descend into individual life on any other condition than entire possession. It comes to the lowly and simple; it comes to whomever [sic] puts off what is foreign and proud; it comes as insight; it comes as serenity and grandeur.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the sentiment tells man in concrete cases that the best is true. Regardless of the stage of development the sentiment tells man what concretely gives him fullest power to live; once refined to a moral plane (as the moral sentiment) it tells man what he ought to do.<sup>71</sup> Eventually man discovers what makes him truly creative is belief in God.

#### Basis for Trust in the Standard of Satisfaction

But what grounds the reliability of the standard of satisfaction? This standard, the moral sentiment, gets its support

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<sup>69</sup>Cf. ibid., Vol. II, pp. 281; 293; Vol. I, p. 125.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 289-290.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 293-294.



on the same basis as all other features of reality that arise spontaneously while a person lives the life of self-surrender, or simplicity. Recall Emerson's fundamental assumption that we must trust nature enough to believe that whatever question nature raises it will answer. This belief he implements in the attitude of simplicity, a surrender to living as the source for all truth about reality. Trusting nature means trusting that vital activity will provide answers to all the questions that living itself brings up. Whatever spontaneously springs up as a response to an issue for the pure of heart--for one who has committed himself totally to trusting nature--must be true, though of course true in a limited and reformable sense. The alternative implies for Emerson that nature is chaotic and unreliable. But then we would live in a world where living is impossible, which is not the case.

Perhaps he first alerted himself to look for some mark by which to know in any given case whether nature has answered a question for us, because he believed that one of the most central questions that living could raise was "How shall I know that what I do promotes life (is true) or not?" As it turned out the moral sentiment was the only standard which nature offered him in response to the question. Once sentiment appears on the scene it can be doubted as a standard if and only if it is doubtful that nature is reliable.

### Role of Community

It does not appear that Emerson rests content to make his moral sentiment stand as the solitary judge of truth. Curiously, his individuality and aloofness dominate the typical portrait of him not only as a man but as a scholar. Self-reliance gets thrown against other-reliance as if he could not reconcile the two. Why this should be so stems from several facts on which we cannot tarry--among them his personal ambivalencies regarding social attachments, and the exaggerated picture of his ambivalence which resulted from the unfortunate oversolicitous editing of the Emerson-Forbes journals.<sup>72</sup>

The fact is that he exercised his self-reliance within a definite social framework. He regarded as a further check on the worth of his ideas their acceptance among honest simple-hearted men. If they found his observations agreeing with their own lived experiences he had a further assurance for the truth of those observations. This side of him may not be obvious in his essays. He did not theorize much on this point, but there are strong supporting reasons for this position. First of all he shared with the Transcendentalists a belief in nature and in the reliability of the simple person. What the simple man claimed to be true would have to be true. This was the reformulation of the theoretical basis for democracy which he and the New England

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<sup>72</sup>JMN, Vol. I, pp. xiii-xxxiv.

Transcendentalists were seeking. For him, the simple men would be most apt to be among the young Americans. He went to great lengths to come into contact with this audience as often as possible. To test and develop his beliefs he placed them before these simple natural souls whom he hoped to find in this special audience--few though these simple men may be. He adjusted his thoughts according to their response.<sup>73</sup>

### Self-Reformatory Quality of True Belief

We have seen that ideas are true insofar as they effect ascension, and that ascension is discovered by practical tests, in which the sentiment of approbation--individual and collective--determines the extent of ascension. Ascension, however, never reaches an absolute or ultimate level. All reality constantly evolves. Therefore, the proper theory about the general statements and beliefs relating to the world must be developmental too. Of the power of a general principle Emerson explains that the moment confers "a sort of omnipresence and omnipotence which asks nothing of duration but sees that the energy of the mind is commensurate with the work to be done," and only of enough energy to work now.<sup>74</sup> For application to a future case, the generalization requires adjustment, refinement. "Every act"--and hence

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<sup>73</sup>Cf. Cowan, City of the West, pp. 10-12, 18-19; Carl Bode, The American Lyceum (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 225.

<sup>74</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 317; Vol. III, pp. 243-244.

ideal--"has some falsehood of exaggeration in it." Man inclines to make his ideas or his achievements absolute. That tendency is the exaggeration. We live in a world where there is no final success; each achievement is a promise to further achievement. "Step by step we scale this mysterious ladder: the steps are actions, the new prospect is power."<sup>75</sup> In other words, we discover that insight is limited. A new situation uncovers a dissatisfaction with the previous level of insight and achievement. A new search begins for that general principle which will insure a further degree of self-fulfillment. "Every action admits of being outdone. Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end to nature, but every end is a beginning."<sup>76</sup> The need for further verification never ceases.

The shift in the object of self-fulfillment does not entail falsity of the previous object. Nor is doubt cast on the reliability of nature, on which the procedure rests. We are not committed to a topsy-turvy world. The structures of the world remain continuous--but growing. Hence statements verified in a past intuition remain true when subsumed into the present lived experience; they become false only when regarded as final. "Truth is our element of life, yet if a man fasten his attention on a single aspect of truth it becomes distorted and not itself but

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 305; Vol. III, pp. 185, 190.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 301.

falsehood."<sup>77</sup> True generalizations subsume prior generalizations. The artist, for instance, creates something new, but he still begins with the first elements, though on the most advanced stage. The reason Emerson gives for this is poignant. "Otherwise all goes to ruin." What he says of the artist applies to all true insight. The artist, after all, and the poet are they who have developed the ability to see the truth by intuition. The real or true is beautiful, because it is natural and graceful. We may recall the earlier quote from "Circles"--that each fact is but a generalization on the way to another fuller generalization. The test of a proposition is the extent to which it places man satisfactorily in specific--though not total--power over his environment. No generalization is final; each promises a fuller satisfaction. Satisfaction is discovered only by living according to the latest generalization.

### Résumé and Conclusion

Simplicity opens man to spontaneity, which in turn yields a procedure for verifying beliefs about reality. Since to be real means to evolve, the procedure gauges the relation between beliefs and what evolves or ascends. Beliefs are tested by natural living. Insofar as they promote ascension, fuller degrees of self-realization or creativity they are true. The mark

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 339. Nature "punishes abstractionists ...It is not the intention of Nature that we should live by general views." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 237.

of a genuine ascent is the arousal of the sentiment of approbation for the sort of actions resulting from commitment to a given belief. A community of like-minded men provide a cross-check on the credibility of an individual's assessment of his beliefs. Since the achievement of any level of power opens man to still higher possibilities, no final test of belief is possible. The procedure must espouse an evolutionary theory of truth.

Of all beliefs confirmed by his procedure the supreme case is his belief in God's existence. For if fullness of power is the key to satisfaction, can there be any highest or lasting principle which will direct the widest satisfaction of man's potential? The following two chapters establish that Emerson maintained in accordance with his procedure that a supreme boundless source of creativity whom he calls God exists. God opens man to his fullest development, to his fullest ascension.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TERM 'GOD'

Emerson contends that to be real is to be creative, and that the test of belief is its fruitfulness in promoting creativity. He further asserts that there exists a primal boundless source for all creativity called God. This chapter concentrates on the way he arrived at 'the primal boundless source of creativity' as the designation for the term 'God';<sup>1</sup> the next chapter takes up his argument for God's existence.

Emerson declares that God cannot be "intellectually discerned" but God can be "felt." In other words God is not known by Understanding but by Reason. Natural situations give rise to these feelings which indicate what 'God' means. The first part of this chapter focuses on these situations. What arises in them is a feeling of religiousness toward something regarded as both present yet somehow inaccessible. The second topic is the meaning of this 'presence and inaccessibility.' It yields the designation 'boundless source of creativity' for 'God.'

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<sup>1</sup>The primal boundless source of creativity' will serve hereinafter as a shorthand for a fuller description to be given shortly. Cf. n. 28, below. This shorthand was selected for convenience and because it indicates the predicates Emerson seems to emphasize most.

In that Emerson held God could not be discerned intellectually his position falls within the mainstream of much Christian thinking.<sup>2</sup> Christian theologians and philosophers have traditionally insisted that God is beyond human comprehension. Still, based on the qualities of certain activities within primary experience or intuition, he does give a description of the term 'God' derived from the fact God's presence can be felt. "I say I make my circumstance; but if you ask me, Whence I am? I feel like other men my relation to that Fact, which cannot be spoken, or defined or even thought, but which exists, and will exist."<sup>3</sup> We must remind ourselves that 'feeling' as he uses it means the moral sentiment, primary intuition,<sup>4</sup> which occurs only when the intellect, will, senses and feelings, operate in a single organic unity in concrete acts of spontaneous living. The feeling of the presence of God--sense of being, Emerson also calls it--arises under these conditions.<sup>5</sup> Since it is present in consciousness it is open to some description.

<sup>2</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 274. God is the "Unknown, the Inevitable, the Divine." Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 352. God is that "deep force, that last fact behind which analysis cannot go." Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>3</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 335.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>"The sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things...but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed." Ibid., Vol. II, p. 64.



### Situations Revealing What 'God' Means

The discovery of his meaning for 'God' requires investigation of the situations in which the simple man spontaneously becomes acquainted with what 'God' means. The most obvious and typical situation occurs when a person "communes with nature," when for instance he looks up at the stars, gazes at a panoramic horizon or basks in the solitude of a woods in summer-time. But these are not the only events which reveal divine presence. Acts of gracefulness, genius, character, virtue, all manifestations of beauty, are natural events which have this power too. Indeed anything grasped in intuition, in ordinary experience--without artificiality, duplicity, formalism--is natural and hence may open us to recognizing the presence of God.<sup>6</sup>

I embrace the common, explore and sit at the feet of the familiar and low. Give me insight into today... What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat, the glance of the eye ...; show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking...in these suburbs and extremities of nature.<sup>7</sup>

Character, genius, virtue, gracefulness, beauty, all bear in a striking way on the extent to which man is free to exercise power of self-determination. Consequently they are especially provocative instances of natural events. As a case in point,

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 129-130; Rusk, Letters, Vol. I, pp. 174-175; McGiffert, YES, pp. 120-126 (January, 1831).

<sup>7</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 111.

Emerson tells us that what we admire most in a man of character is his freedom, his self-determination, his consequent wisdom and power. Similarly the power of genius comes to man only upon self-abandonment to nature. Virtue, too, arises only when man gives himself over to spontaneity.<sup>8</sup> Indeed gracefulness and beauty are the necessary results of natural actions since whatever tends unimpeded to its end must be graceful and beautiful.

Meaning of 'Present Yet Inaccessible'

All such natural events share two important features which reveal what 'God' means. First they awaken a feeling of reverence or of religious commitment. Second this feeling is toward something felt to be both present yet inaccessible in the event. Somehow presence and inaccessibility specify the object of religious feeling. But how? We could easily understand that stars and the horizon suggest presence and inaccessibility since they may be visually present yet beyond reach. But Emerson had something more in mind than sensible presence and insurmountable physical distance. The woods, beautiful flowers, are present and also quite accessible. Still they too occasion the revelation of the divine--the present yet inaccessible.<sup>9</sup> It is important to learn how 'presence and inaccessibility' designate the object of the religious sentiment.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 7-11; Vol. III, p. 26; Vol. I, pp. 120-128.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 8-11.

Emerson believes that something invariably happens in the natural event which elevates it beyond what any calculation from given forces on hand could explain. For instance, he states: "This is that which we call Character--a reserved force, which acts directly by presence and without means." Genius and virtue move forward in qualitative leaps, rending time and space, contradicting by their evolution the laws of sensuous experience. There is always more to an event than we can solidify into everlasting concepts. Beauty too always ultimately eludes our quest. Indeed a man might come to resent this were it not that this tantalizing characteristic of beauty converts all nature into a vast promise.<sup>10</sup> Man is turned by constitution toward the inaccessible. Whatever he does he will outstrip by further and further stages of development. Each natural event promises another and a better one.

Emerson maintains that confronted with the novelty in these natural events man feels spontaneously that some source of creativity is present which brings the evolution to pass. This source is boundless in its capacity for further novel stages. Its possibilities can never be lastingly circumscribed either by human intelligence or in reality. Like a horizon it forever outstrips full possession.<sup>11</sup> It is to this boundless source of

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 89; Vol. II, pp. 272-276; Vol. III, p. 393; *JMN*, Vol. V, p. 129 (1836).

<sup>11</sup> Emerson, *Works*, Vol. I, pp. 10, 16; Vol. III, p. 171. Emerson calls God "the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet." *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 301.

creativity in a natural event that the religious sentiment attaches itself. Since it is the source of an actual ascension, it is present; since it is boundless in its perpetually creative drive toward higher stages of ascension, it is also inaccessible.

### Human Soul Suggesting this Notion of God

Texts which expressly discuss the meaning of the term 'God' confirm this conclusion. I wish to center on two of them. In the first, the departure is the human soul.

What is God? The most elevated conception of character that can be formed in the mind. It is the individual's own soul carried to perfection. For no other deity can he conceive. He is infinite as I am finite; He is sinless as I am sinful...<sup>12</sup>

Several typically Emersonian beliefs are suggested in this passage. To say that God is the soul of the individual carried to perfection implies that God is soul stripped of limits. The soul in the classical philosophical tradition is understood as the principle of life. This seems to fit Emerson's perspective. The Over-Soul, another term for the divine, vivifies all reality. Pressing this thought, it is apparent that 'being' and 'life' are synonymous with 'ascension' or 'creativity.' Hence we may say that God is infinite life, infinite being, infinite creativity.

Further, the line "He is infinite as I am finite. He is sinless as I am sinful," conveys the contrast between the boundless creativity of God and the limited stagnated state of man by

<sup>12</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 182 (1830).

himself. Emerson linked human limitation with sinfulness. He asserts that the only way we can establish that we are not simply aspects of divinity is through our free will. "Your reason is God, your virtue is God, and nothing but your liberty, can you call securely and absolutely your own." Our liberty is our principle limitation. Just how this limits us he makes plain when he insists that to live a man must act spontaneously rather than allow his will to interfere with the directions of nature. Interference limits living. For this reason Emerson could exclaim that "the only sin is limitation."<sup>13</sup> Self-will is limiting and sinful. Limitation is sinful because it implies the individual's exercise of will over and against natural process. This thwarts ascension, the action of the divine force of life. To act against nature's directionality is to counter God's will.

God, however, is limitless. He is spontaneity itself, the ultimate source of creativity.

The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust. Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without paralax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> McGiffert, YES, p. 4; Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 308.

<sup>14</sup> Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 64. Italics mine.

Nature in General Suggesting this Notion of God

The second passage takes as its departure observations of natural events surrounding man which suggest the presence of God within all nature.

The sovereignty of this nature whereof we speak [God] is made known by its independency of those limitations which circumscribe us on every hand. The soul [God] circumscribes all things. As I have said, it contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes space and time.<sup>15</sup>

Once again in describing what he means by God, he alludes to an unlimited principle--i.e., one which abolishes the limitations of existing under the conditions of time and space.

He is not suggesting that the meaning of the word 'God' involves transcending reality, that it requires us to abolish 'time and space' in every use of the term. That would make the word 'God' patently meaningless. He has in mind instead to distinguish his view from the standard philosophical notion of 'time and space' shared by Locke, Hume, Kant. This standard usage implied first, that all objects in time and space change, and second, that each change is entirely explicable by its sensibly observable causal antecedents. To conceive of being this way under the conditions of time and space suggested a world in which given the knowledge of all causal antecedents of all events, every event would be determined and entirely predictable.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 272.

Emerson refused to accept this view.

How easily, if fate would suffer it, we might keep forever these beautiful limits, and adjust ourselves, once for all, to the perfect calculation of the kingdom of cause and effect. In the street and newspapers, life looks so plain a business that manly resolution and adherence to the multiplication table through all weather will ensure success.<sup>16</sup>

"Perfect calculation" and "adherence to the multiplication table" connote the level of operation directed by Understanding, in which experience is subjected to mathematical generalizations. He here rejects what he regards as the approach typical of the scientist of his day, and insists reality includes far more than sense-observations reveal.<sup>17</sup>

Only Reason or Spirit, not Understanding, contacts reality directly. "But ah! presently comes a day, or is it only a half-hour,...which discomforts the conclusions of nations and of years." These rare moments transport a person to another way of seeing the world, through the eye of Reason. The usefulness of Understanding depends on Reason, which is to Understanding as power is to form. Understanding abstracts form from concrete exercises of power. When power assumes a new function new forms

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup>In remarking that the sensist operates on a "journalist-level" of experience, Emerson is not unlike Kierkegaard, who stormed mightily against the journalist-eye description of reality. But Emerson differs from Kierkegaard in that Emerson still finds a somewhat kindly place for that level. "Calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect" gauges the level of Understanding, which Emerson accepts as an important though derivative grasp of the world.

arise. Hence Understanding, to retain proximate contact with reality must draw off new forms, since man now faces a whole new situation. Old forms cannot be successfully imposed. To immortalize old schemes dooms one to sheer formalism, to living in the past.

Power keeps quite another road than the turnpikes of choice and will; namely the subterranean and invisible tunnels and channels of life....Life is a series of surprises, and would not be worth taking and keeping if it were not. God delights to isolate us every day, and to hide us from the past and the future.<sup>18</sup>

Instead we are commanded to live now. Living involves truly new lines of behavior, new in the sense that they are not entirely predictable from their causal antecedents. Some further source accounts for the novel aspects of the action.

The ardors of piety agree at last with the coldest scepticism--that nothing is of us or our works--that all is of God....I would gladly be moral and keep due metes and bounds which I dearly love, and allow the most to the will of man; but I have set my heart on honesty in this chapter and I can see nothing at last, in success or failure, than more or less of vital force supplied from the Eternal.<sup>19</sup>

Man plans, works long and hard to make for himself a better day, and indeed does achieve improvements. But still "the results of life are uncalculated and uncalculable....The individual is always mistaken. It turns out somewhat new and very unlike what he promised himself."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 67.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-70.



When, therefore, Emerson declares that God is known as what abolishes the limitations of time and space, he does not intend to reserve the use of the word 'God' to what is entirely removed from the world. Of the two ways of looking at the world, Understanding grasps it as though all events were entirely explicable in terms of their causal antecedents; Reason, however, recognizes that events point to a source other than those open to "the perfect calculation of the kingdom of known cause and effect."

After its own law and not by that of arithmetic is the rate of its progression to be computed. The soul's advances are not made by gradation, such as can be represented by motion in a straight line, but rather by ascension of state such as can be represented by metamorphosis.<sup>21</sup>

Abolition of space and time means that the traditional philosophical conception of space and time must be set aside in order to speak meaningfully about God. God is what reason discovers to account for what Understanding cannot in the present, viz., novelty, life, being.

The feeling of the presence of God does not imply removal from lived experience. Quite the contrary:

The sense of being which in calm hourse arises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed man's substitution of what he devises in Understanding by abstraction for what he first found to be real by living explains

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 274.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

how he originally fell into a confusion about his unity with the rest of reality. "We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances, and forget that we have shared their cause."

Emerson considers God to be the primal source of creativity. But when all is said and done, since reality constantly ascends or evolves it is impossible to reach any lasting comprehension of or finally appropriate name for God. Natural events around us, our own feelings, affirm God's presence in concrete activities. But this source of creativity outstrips every formulation of it which its presence grants us. It forever outstrips what it has done--whatever it has revealed to us of itself in transforming our daily acts of living. For this reason Emerson also calls this power "the Unattainable, the flying Perfect."<sup>23</sup>

This primal source takes many other names too. In four pages of "Experience"<sup>24</sup> alone he lists 'Chance,' 'First Cause,' 'Fortune,' 'Minerva,' 'Muse,' 'Holy Ghost,' 'unbounded substance.' But because the source is boundlessly creative every term falls short, each capable of designating only some facet, some particular function of the divine.

### The Over-Soul

What of the term 'Over-Soul'? Popular memory of Emerson

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 70-74.

might suggest this as his chief designation for the divine. Curiously he almost never used the term though he did so entitle an important essay. We may infer that 'Over-Soul' was considered just one of many terms applicable to the divine.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of its infrequent usage, however, it is a singularly appropriate term for the divine within his over-all ontological framework. It underscores what is primary in nature--namely, vitality or creativity.

All the terms used in the essay "Experience" to designate God serve as feeble attempts to verbalize the unbounded source of creativity. This source is also the source of living, evolving, being. Indeed, "in our more correct writing we give to this generalization [vast flowing vigor] the name Being, and thereby confess that we have arrived as far as we can go."<sup>26</sup> Since the source of being or of living is the soul, the supreme source of both may be called the Over-Soul. It supplies growth. But to grow is to ascend, to be. Beyond the entirely determinate series of events which Understanding supposes and which grounds the moral belief in compensation (that every loss is a gain and vice versa) runs a deeper fact, viz., the soul itself.

The soul is not a compensation, but a life. The soul is.....Essence, or God, is not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmation, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all

<sup>25</sup>Robert Detweiler, "The Over-Rated 'Over-Soul'," American Literature, XXXVI (March, 1964), pp. 65, et sqq.

<sup>26</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. III, p. 73.

relations, parts and times within itself.<sup>27</sup>

Being is creative. Events in the dimensions of time and space as Understanding takes them up are not. But insofar as they are swallowed up by Being they become alive and new and real. The term Over-Soul suggests the pervasive force of creativity. 'God' is 'the pervasive primal source of creativity.'

Emerson's 'Divine Creative Source'  
and the Traditional Notion of God

Other properties ascribed to 'God' indicate that Emerson's meaning for the term does not differ vastly from the common Judeo-Christian notion of God.<sup>28</sup> For instance he attaches intelligence, will and uniqueness to 'God'. Though Emerson found traditional Christianity deficient as a religion he continued working through its long established theological framework, particularly along the Augustinian lines. According to Augustinian thinking, Christ is the divine Word, the repository of all divine ideals which serve as the patterns for created beings. The

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 120-121.

<sup>28</sup>By the common Judeo-Christian notion of God I have in mind a description approximating that formulated, e.g., by John Hick: "God is the unique infinite personal Spirit who has created out of nothing everything other than himself; he is eternal and uncreated; omnipotent and omniscient; and his attitude toward his human creatures, whom he has made for eventual fellowship with himself, is one of grace and love." The Existence of God (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), pp. 2-3. We find corresponding predicates affirmed of 'God' throughout Emerson's writings, with the possible exception of personal immortality implied in Hick's description. For Emerson 'God' is the unique personal Spirit, etc.

Father's utterance of the Word issues into creation, the expression of the divine intelligence and will. Emerson considered the world as the spiritual language of God. As created, the world implied divine will, as the language of God it implied divine intelligence. Emerson points to the divine will in the attribution of such terms as "Beauty," "Virtue," "Love" to 'God'.<sup>29</sup> Divine intelligence is asserted in such terms as the "Omniscient," "Supreme Mind," "Divine Mind," etc.<sup>30</sup> Uniqueness is also a property of the Emersonian 'God.' On the negative side, divine uniqueness meant that 'God' is not identical with the sum total of all the workings of persons and things in creation. Positively, it meant 'God' is the supreme maker of the world--which is finite whereas 'God' is not. "That central life is somewhat [something] superior to Creation, superior to knowledge and thought, and contains all its circles." Thus Emerson predicates the rather traditional properties of uniqueness, intelligence and will to 'God.' "The world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active."<sup>31</sup>

The ascription of these three properties to 'God' makes it also possible to describe 'God' as a person, i.e., as that which

<sup>29</sup>For example: "Love...is the essence of God." Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 200. Cf. Vol. II, p. 64, 308; McGiffert, YES, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. II, pp. 276, 280, 288.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 123; Vol. II, p. 318. Cf. Vol II, pp. 272-280.

has intelligence and will of its own right. But this conclusion requires further comment since the way Emerson uses the term 'personal' would at least semantically render his notion of God impersonal.

In Emerson's use of the term, 'person' signifies the particular man. Particular men can be regarded exclusively, or as related to a common divine source. "In youth we are made for persons. Childhood and youth see all the world in them. But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all." The former way of looking at persons is an exaggeration, the latter is the truth. The analysis of the religious importance of Christ brings this out. Jesus "says that God incarnates himself in man and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his world." This is the "doctrine of the soul." Historical Christianity instead offers "an exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual. It had dwelt, in dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus."<sup>32</sup>

Significantly the positive, the ritual, the personal are called exaggerations, in contrast to the "doctrine of the soul." Elsewhere Emerson repeats the contrast, remarking that the spiritual principle should be allowed its full expansion in man "without the admission of anything unspiritual; that is, anything positive, dogmatic, personal."<sup>33</sup> He again is calling the distinc-

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 129-131; Vol. II, p. 277.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 335-336.

tion between Reason and Understanding into play. Understanding, the faculty which considers objects in isolation, creates exaggerations--the positive, the ritual, the dogmatic. Evidently, "person," or at least the "exaggeration of the personal," is to be located within the sphere of Understanding. Understanding, looking on individual men merely as individuals, takes each only as an end to himself; by contrast Reason, recognizing the relatedness of all individual men to God, surrenders private aims to the spontaneous direction of the divine will. "The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe and will have no preference but those of spontaneous love."<sup>34</sup> Viewed according to Reason persons are introductions to God.

Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party...is impersonal; is God.<sup>35</sup>

What is meant by the "impersonal"? We learn this by negating the properties of the personal. It is not something considered in isolation, that much is clear. Even more, the impersonal involves a non-symmetrical relationship with individual men. It is their "common nature," "what invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe," "the identical nature appearing through them all." Emerson tells us "the sovereignty of this nature...is made known by its independency of those

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 277.

limitations which circumscribe us on every hand. The soul circumscribes all things."<sup>36</sup> The relation according to this image is that of the container to the contained. But more precisely the soul is the cause of the world, taking possession of the world by incarnating itself in particular forms.

One mode of the divine teaching is the incarnating of the spirit in a form--in forms like my own. I live in society; with persons who answer to thoughts in my own mind....I see its presence in them. I am certified of a common nature.<sup>37</sup>

Thus God is impersonal--he is the one spirit who gives being and life to many particular human forms. The term person on the contrary belongs to these dependent forms, not to the common informing spirit which forever outstrips these forms.<sup>38</sup>

The statement that God is impersonal must be considered in light of what we have already noted, i.e., that God is unique, intelligent, and possessed of will. God is not impersonal in the sense that a falling rock would be. He is conscious of and involved in the evolution of the universe. God is not impersonal in that the divine is simply identical with the sum total of processes, things and relations in the universe. He is not. He is impersonal in that he is the maker of the world. He is the common omni-related source of being, goodness, life, in the world. Divine aims and acts are not private (personal) aims and acts.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 272.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 276.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 314.



To be the divine creative source is to be impersonal. Nonetheless, Emerson's description of God includes properties--intelligence, will, uniqueness--which together correspond to the what is commonly meant by the term 'person' in the usual Judeo-Christian notion of God.

### Summary

Any natural situation in which a simple man surrenders to the promptings of nature arouses in him a feeling of religiousness toward something regarded as present yet inaccessible--present in the sense that it effects ascension, inaccessible in that it is boundlessly creative. Thus the divine or God means the boundless source of creativity. Many names are applied to this source in order to express some facet of it. 'Over-soul' is an especially appropriate term but because this source is boundless all terms fall short of describing it. Moreover Emerson attaches a number of predicates to the term 'God' which indicate that he did not intend his notion of God to differ greatly from the usual Judeo-Christian notion. Some of these predicates are intelligence, will, uniqueness, love, life, Creator, Spirit, etc.

Emerson believed that the notion of the divine arose in natural situations and that God's reality could be established by the verification procedure which showed God to be the source of all creative advances which took place in nature. The final chapter studies the reasons for these beliefs.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Emerson appeals to the moral sentiment to establish God's existence. Since the moral sentiment affirms the claim that the boundless source of creativity exists, that source must actually. This affirmation of the moral sentiment must be accepted because the opposite position would imply the moral sentiment as such was unreliable, nature untrustworthy and life absurd. The argument has two major stages. The first shows that the moral sentiment actually claims God exists. Following the general lines of the verification procedure, the claim is established in part by the prima facie case that the claim arises spontaneously, and in part by testing the purported claim for its fruitfulness. The second major stage mounts support for the credibility of the claim. In short, all genuine claims of the moral sentiment are to be believed on the general thesis that nature is reliable and that nature reveals the moral sentiment as the means for ascertaining true beliefs.

Before dealing with these stages two preliminary remarks are in order. First, the force of his argument from the moral sentiment is not demonstrative but 'probable( in a sense to be explained. Second, the term 'moral sentiment' broadly taken is

another term for 'verification procedure.'

### Logical Force of the Argument

Emerson's argument is not strictly demonstrative. He did not intend to construct a logically ineluctable proof in which God's existence is established by strict logical entailment, by causal inference. Of course he would insist that logic is important to the argument. Every good argument must have implicit in it a firm logic. He would also agree that the notion of cause-effect is present in the argument, since it concludes that God, the causal source of creativity, exists.

But the argument does not turn directly on the logical entailment from given effect to the necessary inference of its cause. Instead Emerson maintained that man finds a strong relation between his ability to do good and his concrete adherence to the belief that God exists. Upon making an option for the reality of God as causal source (and most fully only then) man discovers himself doing things previously beyond his power. One might suggest almost a ratio between man's ability to do good and the degree of explicitness with which he recognizes God as the source of this new ability. Since the moral sentiment declares to man that God is the source of this power and since man experiences little or no evidence to encourage him to think he himself is its source, man accepts the testimony of the moral sentiment, or ordinary experience, that God is the source of this creative ability. The crux of the argument is not causal inference but

the credibility of the moral sentiment.

If Emerson did not intend his argument to follow by logical or mathematical necessity it is equally clear that he did not think of its force in terms of logical or mathematical-type probabilities. He strongly opposed casting intuition regarding reality into the forms of logic or empirical science, for that would falsify the intuition. Yet he was unshakably firm in his conviction that God exists. The kind of likelihood--perhaps even necessity--he had in mind differed basically from the sort which gained currency through logic and mathematics.

The standard of likelihood grounding his argument was not merely the extent to which his position could admit aspects of reality lost from speculative sight by other approaches; nor the degree of success with which his theory rescued a certain dimension of experience from its paradoxical status in other theories. The standard was what best engendered a healthy life-style, where best was decided by living according to a belief with two consequences--full extension of power of self-realization and feeling of full self-satisfaction.

Thus his argument is not demonstrative. Its merit does not rest solely on necessary logical entailment, nor on logical or mathematical probabilities. Logical and mathematical conceptions of necessity and probability are foreign to his approach. The force of likelihood and necessity is gauged non-mathematically by the fullness of self-realization resulting from commitment to a given belief.

Moral Sentiment a Broad Term  
for Verification Procedure

Before considering the argument we must also specify that the term moral or religious sentiment--just as Reason and intuition--is used broadly to designate his verification procedure. The test of truth is moral fulfilment. If acting according to belief in x results in moral fulfilment x is good and hence real. Recall the word 'feeling' is used to mean 'sentiment.' Unlike Hume's conception of sentiment as something radiated in imagination rather than intellect, Emerson's theory of sentiment unifies the activity of reason with affective states, so that sentiment means a direct affective-cognitive relation of a man in a concrete present situation calling for active response. If under a specific set of conditions a person feels morally attracted to attain x, and if acting for attainment of x in fact begets the moral satisfaction anticipated, x must be real.

How man reaches this level of insight--that the best satisfaction is a key to deciding what is real and that moral satisfaction is the best--comes about by means of a trial-and-error procedure directed by insight or intuition at more primitive levels of development. The procedure is governed by a series of conditions. Since intuition and moral sentiment are at bottom the same, the conditions proper to intuition are proper also to moral sentiment, the difference being that at the latter stage the standard of satisfaction has been established to be moral rather than biological or utilitarian.

The conditions governing the claims of the moral sentiment are three. First, truth comes through intuition only on condition of simplicity, total dedication to making the lived experience alone the source for all affirmations or denials about reality. This is roughly similar to phenomenological reduction whereby an individual as he enters into the search for truth, intends to exclude all preoccupations, preconceptions, and partialities toward one or another view about self or the object of consciousness. Emerson regards this an absolute precondition for moral sentiment. Secondly x or y arises as that which claims to be most fulfilling of man's real self-image. X or y arise spontaneously but only after much struggle for simplicity. They arise spontaneously but not always without prior effort. Finally beyond becoming aware of the claims of the object a man must test its claims in practice in order to distinguish whether the object truly issues from intuition or whether it is bred from self-delusion. Emerson's dealings with the Transcendentalists with regard to their conflicting intuitions seems to have impressed upon him that insights required further justification than simply their arising in the mind of an honest man. Their practical claims must be tested practically. He holds that when all conditions are present, the moral sentiment indeed reveals God as the supreme object for moral commitment.

That the Moral Sentiment Claims  
God as its Supreme Object

The nucleus of the argument is that since the moral sentiment claims God as the supreme object of moral fulfilment, God exists. The first task is to show the moral sentiment genuinely claims God as its supreme object. Establishing its genuineness has two steps. The first studies the various objects which the moral sentiment claims as proper objects. Materialities, friends, love, are examples of these objects. The purpose is to show that all such objects while proper for moral commitment are not supreme objects, and that commitment to them eventually leads to the spontaneous belief in God as the supreme object. The other step fortifies the prima facie credibility of the spontaneous belief by testing the belief for its fruitfulness.

The argument begins with a study of four sorts of objects which offer fulfilment--materialities, timeless laws of the mind, persons, virtues. Emerson was particularly interested to know why they called forth a total religious and moral commitment when in every case they eventually failed to give full satisfaction. He also wondered why upon disenchantment, pursuit began anew. He examined the various aspects of this phenomenon to learn whether the sentiment attached to the various concrete objects indicated a pattern revealing any fundamental inclinations in the sentiment itself. As we shall see, Emerson decided that these objects draw our religious commitment because they dimly suggest man's true object of worship, God. Dedication to materialities,

friends, honors, etc. breed eventual discontent with them and a renewed search because they are not themselves the highest object for human happiness.

### Study of Objects and the Feeling of Religiousness

All sorts of objects propose themselves to man as the supreme object for moral striving. Because they promise the highest fulfilment man totally dedicates himself to their pursuit. Peculiarly, regardless of the object selected, he feels in his dedication a sense of religious submission.

Focusing on this feeling of religiousness, Emerson notes that certain insights, those that discover central principles governing reality, are attended by the emotion of the sublime. By the emotion of the sublime he meant the feeling of delight and satisfaction which arises in those moments when we stand in awe before the principles we have discovered. At such moments we are impelled to regard our discovery with obedience engendered by the awe, and with a certain enthusiasm begotten by the delight. Quietist rapture, Calvinist revival, Methodist experience, are instances of this enthusiasm. It can range in intensity from "the faint glow of virtuous emotions, to its rarest appearance, prophetic inspiration." The direct result of this religious enthusiasm is to place the person in an order of activity far superior in quality and effectiveness to what he could rightly expect on the basis of his own given capabilities. It is important to bear this in mind. Insights, or "Revelations" as he



calls them, do not issue forth so much into words but into activities. Revelation is not fortunetelling but a force inclining man to truly live in the present.<sup>1</sup>

Emerson calls this feeling of awe and delight "religious" because its features are the same claimed for religion by sincere worshippers, viz., reverence and submission. The word 'awe' in contemporary usage most often signifies having reverence for something other than and superior to the one having the feeling. The object of awe is usually taken to be endowed with great authority and power over the one feeling it. The implication of reverence and submission is not lost in Emerson's use of 'awe'. One clear textual basis for this conclusion rests on a passage in the "Divinity School Address," where in describing the religious sentiment he substitutes "reverence and delight" for "awe and delight." The element of submission is shown in that upon coming into the religious sentiment man feels a desire to obey.<sup>2</sup>

Emerson feels quite free to identify the religious sentiment with the moral sentiment. The principles discovered which cause the religious feelings carry with them moral commands; conversely the commands which give rise to the moral sentiment excite religious feelings. The moral sentiment is an insight into principles which turn out to be divine laws. The sentiment these laws arouse is one of reverence and delight. Close study shows that

<sup>1</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. II, pp. 281-285, 290-293.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 121; Vol. II, pp. 281, et sqq.; pp. 290, et sqq.

these laws express the "sublime creed that the world is not the product of manifold powers but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active;" that all evil is so much non-entity, whereas benevolence, or the good, is alone absolute and real; that so much benevolence a man has so much life has he. The perfection of the laws of the soul tell us that man is real or living insofar as he partakes of this power to do good; and that the results of this power far outstrip man's personal capabilities. "The perception of this law of laws awakens in the mind a sentiment which we call the religious sentiment, and which makes our highest happiness. Wonderful is its power to charm and command."<sup>3</sup>

The various objects to which man feels religious commitment eventually fail him. Study of these objects and their failures reveals that they serve to direct man to the eventual recognition of the primal source of creativity as the supreme moral object.

#### The Material and the Mental as Objects

Materialities--man's physical surroundings in whole or part--are the most evident sort of things which promise self-fulfilment on condition of total dedication to their pursuit. In time, however, man comes to realize that in fact materiality exists to serve him, not the other way around. Materialities then will fall short as moral objects. As Emerson says of our enchantment

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 125; pp. 122-125.

with scenes of nature, of the rainbow, stars, shadows in the still waters, if we hunt them out too eagerly their unreality rocks us. Once we realize that all our rapture turns upon nothing more significant than an accumulation of globes of water, specks of dust, light and our given physical perspective we react with embarrassment and disappointment. We then seek elsewhere for the true object of our craving, an object worthy of our dedication.<sup>4</sup>

Man may feel he has found it in the recognition that environment serves him, or more precisely that it obeys his mind according to timeless laws. Even the most primitive level of this revelation, when man first merely suspects he is different from what he observes, stimulates the moral or religious sentiment. [There] arises a pleasure mixed with awe; I may say a low degree of the sublime is felt."<sup>5</sup> Insight into this principle indeed renews the moral sentiment. But the tendency to fix upon the mind as the object for moral commitment runs off too easily into adulation for some changeless, absolute ideal wherein both the process and materiality of our given existence get lost. Emerson believes that formal institutional Christianity and philosophical realism exemplify this extreme. He rejects the appeal to this dedication to the intellect basically because the enthusiasm following upon it is sterile--it does not incite and demand

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 19, 49; cf., Vol. III, pp. 192-193.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 51.

a better quality of human behavior in daily living.

### Other Persons and Virtues as Objects

Short of carrying to the extreme of idealism the realization that matter serves man, an individual may as readily settle upon the belief that the object of the moral sentiment is another mind, another person with whom he must relate, say, in love, or friendship and loyalty, or by honoring that person. Emerson takes each of these possibilities under consideration.

Love, and the admiring loyalty we call friendship, address themselves to a person on whom we wish to bestow all our affection and attention. We are interested at first in some specific individual. But not only do lovers and friends pass away leaving us with a void, continued acquaintance with them when they are with us eventually conveys to us that their power to grow, to do the better thing, has limits. What we desired in them was the goodness we saw in them. The discovery that they can only do so much good before they get trapped in the circles of their own routine instigates the return of uneasiness. We conclude that the true object of our desire was not the person but the ideal of goodness or creativity we at first thought resided unbounded in the person. It is a common enough experience that sooner or later we move on to higher objects--some ideals we saw in the person--in hopes to find there the fulfilment we sought in our attachment to the person. We now set as our goal certain limited ideals (some virtues, for instance). But the same

uneasiness carries man even beyond commitment to these limited ideals.

A pattern begins to emerge. Whether the object of the lover is concrete or ideal the passion is the same--a feeling for total devotion and self-sacrifice for the object and a desire for a sort of goodness that seems invariably to escape man's grasp. Friendship discloses that "man wants to feel himself backed by a superior nature," and that "the mind was made with this intent--to go outside itself and apply its affections to some other being."<sup>6</sup> This "other being" will turn out to be a superior being deserving of man's obedience. No finite objects of love or friendship satisfy. They do not measure up to what we thought the moral sentiment claimed they would achieve for us upon our total commitment to them--the happiness of full self-possession.

Honor has an advantage over love and friendship as a means to leading us to the true moral object. In honoring a person, the sentiment is never proffered to the person as such but to a quality in that person. We pay honor to a "delicate sense of right which, when sealed in a noble breast, quick and correct in its judgments," is truly a fit representative of those central and divine principles that evoke the religious sentiment. As we saw earlier divine principles are creative principles. Hence creative judgment is meant here. Yet just as love and friendship, which have limited objects before them, honor too fails.

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<sup>6</sup>McGiffert, YES, pp. 153-154.

A man may be honorable only in some respects. He may have total dedication to certain ideals yet with regard to other ideals he may be quite immoral. In short a hero's ability to make creative judgments turns out to be limited. But that, the ideal of boundless creative judgment, is what we intended to honor.<sup>7</sup>

Whether the object is material or ideal the result is always disappointment--invariably for the same reason. The object fails to give man sufficient measure of freedom and creative power. The destiny of material things depends on man's mind, not vice versa. Dedication to the products of intelligence, timeless laws, also inhibit creative development. Love, pursuit of virtues in general, also disappoint because they too fail to deliver those endless possibilities of further creativity which first attachment to them suggested. Yet throughout, the religious sentiment directed commitment to them for their promise of boundless creative dominion.

#### Analysis of the Religious Sentiment Itself

At this point Emerson's focus shifts. He proposes that for his analysis, the sentiment which these objects roused is more deserving of attention than the objects themselves.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the sentiment itself indicates the highest moral object.

Turning attention directly upon this "impulse to believe,"

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 157-158; Emerson, Works, Vol. II, pp. 45, 171.

this "strong instinct to worship," he remarks that man has an overwhelming inclination to magnify certain things to the point of idolizing them. We glorify natural spectacles; we exaggerate the qualities of a good friend beyond fact; a great man we claim is very great, even literally the very best sort of man. The reason for this exaggerating is not adulation or vanity. We really wish to convince ourselves that the object of our regard is truly the highest and most perfect. Of course such overstatements are faults; yet beyond what we apprehend in the qualities we praise, lurks something true which, if explored, will bare the true object of the moral sentiment.<sup>9</sup> The tendency to magnify the superlatives suggests that the object proper to the moral sentiment is something other than man, superior to him, the highest good, the most graceful, becoming or beautiful. That is what man believes he is attaching himself to in friendship or in honoring a hero.

It would seem as if the soul had been made to go outside of itself, to apply itself in all its length and breadth to something else--that is, to God. Therefore we approve when it goes out of itself and does thus devote itself to true friendship or to Science--we approve for we compare this action with selfishness. But when the idea of God is suggested we feel these are but half, that the act is true but the object is untrue.<sup>10</sup>

Two points stand out in this passage. First, selfless dedication implies that the soul was made for something other than itself. Secondly, upon placing the idea of God before the soul,

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<sup>9</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 166.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

it realizes that the true object for its self-sacrifice is God, the boundless source of creativity. In other words, the soul moves away from dependent objects with whose possession it feels restless; it moves toward that source upon which earlier objects depend--the source with which, upon discovery, the soul both feels satisfied and which it concludes was the truly intended object for its dedication all along.

The human soul has a propensity to refer all its higher feelings, all its veneration for virtue and greatness to something wherein this attribute (or power) is supposed to reside. Cause and effect is another name for this sentiment. It is felt by all.<sup>11</sup>

The object for moral commitment, therefore, is God, which we have seen means the boundless source of creativity.

His belief that the nature of the primal source is boundless, grows out of his reflection on the human tendency to magnify the worth of the object of dedication, viz., that what we are doing in effect is attempting to create objects adequate to our desires. The moral sentiment prevents the man from settling into a final belief that objects which do not promote ever further ascension can really serve this purpose. It refuses to relax its search for an object matching what we believed were in such objects to discover, i.e., boundless creative power. The reason man decides the boundless or infinite is the proper object of the moral sentiment does not rest on analysis but simply upon the fact that when he comes to the awareness of the

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<sup>11</sup>JMN, Vol. I, p. 76; cf. Emerson, Works, Vol. II, p. 169; Vol. III, pp. 228-229.



infinite, he feels that is the supreme object of moral satisfaction. To keep the logic of the argument clear it is worth stressing that though the moral sentiment points to God as the boundless source of creativity, the argument is not intended as causal. The belief in the boundless source of creativity arises as a spontaneous claim. The weight of the logic is what arises in such a way is to be believed, not the analytic inference from effect to cause.

### Reformulation of the Analysis

To restate the first phase of Emerson's study, we have found that man feels he must do what is best for him, i.e., he ought to do what is good. The moral sentiment, the developed form of intuition, discloses that the good means the creative, that which improves the quality of life. Other equivalents for the good are the natural, the graceful, the beautiful, the real. Man may believe he has found the good in love or friendship, for example. But invariably there arises a feeling of dissatisfaction with the object of love and friendship. Discontent grows out of the eventual and gradual recognition of the limits of the object. Goodness is creative; the creative does not involve repetition of the same kinds of act. Intimate acquaintance with one's beloved discloses that what seemed genuine goodness or creativity in the person was not. The acts of the beloved may follow each other in an ascending plane. (Hence some semblance of creativity). But sooner or later we find that the acts are

really parts of a wide circle of acts which repeats itself, ever the same, over and over again. Repetition is not creativity.

Fathoming the limits of the object is disillusioning. Man recognizes that he has mistakenly committed himself to a partial reflection of the good rather than to the source of the good. The moral sentiment suggests that it is with the source that man must concern himself. While as a matter of fact a person in turn places his homage at the feet of many objects that are sources of the creative--nature teaches us slowly, each step of the revelation preparing us for the next--none of these relieve the impulse to resume the search for too long a time. At this point man may come to recognize the unlimited source of good as the true object of the moral sentiment.<sup>12</sup>

A person needs a span of time to arrive at this conclusion--not so much to systematically eliminate finite goods class by class, since typically men do not operate that way, but more to note and study the de facto peculiarity of the natural operation of the moral sentiment. That peculiarity is the refusal of the moral sentiment to rest secure with finite objects of any number of various kinds. An individual wonders why he feels restless with finite sources. Studying the span of his experience, he observes a pattern. When man moves from object to object in his quest for the good, in all cases he seeks a purer form of creativity. Perhaps then he is destined for creativity in itself--the

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<sup>12</sup>JMN, Vol. I, p. 76.

absolute good. Even when a person commits himself to very limited concrete objects, such as a friend or beloved, the exaggeration of the good in the object of commitment reflects his intention to commit himself to the infinite good or creativity in itself. The human heart impatient with finite things, "loves to lose itself in the contemplation of the vast and unbounded," source for all the good in human action.<sup>13</sup> Upon coming to the suggestion that the absolute good, the absolute source of creativity, should be sought in all things the sentiment of moral approbation stirs again. Now, as Emerson says, man feels God is the proper object for moral dedication; that in all previous searches the activity was appropriate but the objects sought were not sufficient.

The previous levels of the struggle for lasting fulfillment suggest that beatitude comes to man when he exercises fully his illimitable creative "realizing" power. At this point man feels that only belief in God as the boundless source of creativity opens him to the fullness of this power. This source is the supreme object of the moral sentiment because upon coming to that suggestion the moral sentiment feels that such is so.

#### Test of the Claim for its Fruition

Yet the credibility of the assertion has not been finalized. A Transcendentalist might urge that whatever the upright simple

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<sup>13</sup> McGiffert, YES, pp. 152, 151 (1831).

man feels (intuits) as true, is true. For Emerson this sort of reliance on feeling was too facile. Simplicity demanded trust be limited to those cases in which the worth of an ideal had been tested in practice. Only when he lived according to the ideal which indeed simplicity and integrity placed before him and, in so living, came to feel that the ideal achieved what it promised, could a man claim the object was true. The pragmatic test was an important hedge against self-deception. Thus belief in God has yet to be tested in practice. That is the final condition.

When the moral sentiment presents x object for moral commitment it does so with the claim that acting to attain x will make man most happy. Emerson considers human self-fulfilment to be that happiness. Thus the claims of the moral sentiment are such that x will be most self-fulfilling. The standard for self-fulfilment is some self-image of man. That image the process of intuition determines and clarifies by the following procedure. First the self-image reveals itself as a given desire or feeling for the attaining of x object. Second, the validity of the image is tested to discover if indeed acting to attain x gives man the feeling that x or objects of x-sort satisfy the self-image. Limited satisfaction with achieving x indicates something in the initial feeling which demands further clarification. Next, y spontaneously offers itself. Activity prepares for more thought. This procedure is repeated again and again until ideally full satisfaction and full insight are reached.

### Effects of Belief in God

Emerson is clear about the self-fulfilling effects commitment to God will have. Reliance on God frees man to be himself--he will be most natural, uninhibited, most capable of being good and therefore of effecting good in his environment. He will have the power to effect ascension, evolution, in the processes of his surroundings. Possessed of belief in God man will experience power for good on levels of activity previously quite beyond his reach. He will feel self-determined and satisfied.

Descriptions of the effects following commitment to belief in God abound in Emerson's works. They often run on in tones of rapture for pages. Thus, in 1832, he writes this response to the sceptical charge that we have no certain grounds for belief in virtue or reality:

This is a true account of our instinctive faith. Why do I believe in a perfect system of compensations, that exact justice is done? Certainly not upon a narrow experience of a score or a hundred instances. For I boldly affirm and believe the universality of the law. But simply that it is better in the view of the mind than any other way, therefore must be the truer way. Whatever is better must be the truer way.<sup>14</sup>

Ten years later, when he had matured and modified his thought he remarks, "...the general impression which a doctrine makes on us, I think is the test of its truth. If it frees and enlarges--if it helps me, then it is true; and not otherwise." But perhaps the shortest is the most poignant statement: "This [religious]

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<sup>14</sup>JMN, Vol. III, p. 317.

sentiment is divine and deifying. It is the beatitude of man. It makes him illimitable."<sup>15</sup> Belief in God places man in the condition of his highest happiness; superior results prove the reality of the object of this belief. And in the "Over-Soul" he relates that the divine presence affirms itself in us as "the doubling of the heart itself, nay, the infinite enlargement of the heart with a power of growth to a new infinity on every side."<sup>16</sup> Two implications of this quotation should be underscored. First, the choice of the word "heart" directs our attention to the figurative locus for the religious sentiment. The sentiment, not the logic of argument, establishes the reality of God. Secondly the expression "doubling of the heart" and its intensified form "infinite enlargement of the heart with a power of growth" points out the unique effect which follows belief in God. By himself man must remain in the chains of cosmic necessity of time and space. Believing in God liberates him. He becomes a creator, he can make new things happen. He actively participates in the evolution of nature.<sup>17</sup> That is what "a power of growth to a new infinity on every side" is intended to convey. By evolution Emerson means growth, qualitative ascent.

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<sup>15</sup>Rusk, Letters, Vol. III, p. 77; Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. II, pp. 292-293.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 125. "Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite." Ibid., p. 64.

Thus, belief in God gives man the power to do good, free from outside interferences which would tie him to the level of entirely determined series of causes and effects. To do good means to achieve creative novelty, ascension, being. Hence the sort of good act which results from belief in God is creative novelty. Acts of ascension, as he refers to them, are those not entirely determined by their given causal antecedents in sensuous time and space. Their source ultimately is God, who is most free, i.e., completely self-determined. Man by abandoning himself to nature opens himself to the working of God's creative will. Insofar as he surrenders to God's will in nature and acts spontaneously, according to the directions of the divine will in nature, man also becomes free, self-determined. He finds himself performing acts which run contrary to the laws which men of Understanding had concluded were ultimate, changless and inviolable. He is free; he is creative. And because of this man feels lastingly self-fulfilled. Placed in the context of the argument for God's existence the fact of man's self-determination establishes that God exists.

#### That the Moral Sentiment Claims God Exists

But does the moral sentiment actually claim that God exists? Having established that the moral sentiment claims God as its supreme object, it is essential to the argument to link that with the further claim that this supreme object exists.

The belief in God as the supreme object of the moral

sentiment includes the claim that God is real. That such is Emerson's view is clear, but his reasoning remains rather implicit. Yet his thinking is not too difficult to piece together. All objects which claim to be proper to the moral sentiment include the claim of reality. They arise in natural beliefs which purport factual content. As we have seen, it is basic to his outlook that the claims of natural beliefs deserve credence. Since nature is trustworthy it is appropriate to rely on it and the deliverances of natural beliefs resulting from this reliance. He rejects Hume's notion that natural beliefs are merely practical postulates of no objective import. Instead for him a belief claiming factuality is either true or false. It is true as it promotes human living, false as it does not.

For instance beliefs in the external world or in the presence of order in it arise not just as regulative postulates but as factual. Their claims to reality are credible because they are natural beliefs; they are falsifiable according to their failure to promote human living. Similarly belief in whatever object, say x, as proper to the moral sentiment includes the claim of reality for x. This belief too is credible if it is a natural belief. A natural belief satisfies the conditions of simplicity and spontaneity. Spontaneity requires the belief be tested for its claim--as in this case that x is proper to the moral sentiment. Propriety is decided by the extent of self-fulfilling creative power which results from acting according to belief in x. If x is proper to the moral sentiment, belief in x



must be a natural belief. Hence the concomitant claim that x is real stands since the claims of natural beliefs are to be trusted.

Various objects propose themselves in natural beliefs as the supreme object of moral fulfilment, yet they are later set aside. This, however, does not militate against trust in natural belief. What man sets aside is their claim to supremacy not their propriety. Emerson reasons that with the exception of God as the explicit object all other objects of the moral sentiment preserve their claim to reality solely on the grounds that they are proper to objects for moral fulfilment. Though they originally appear as supreme--proper in that sense--the sense of their 'propriety' undergoes continuous modification, the most significant of which is that they are not supreme. What is discarded is the exaggeration in the way they were originally taken. It turns out that to believe only x or y and not God is fulfilling has too narrow a scope.

Their disposal as supreme does not necessitate their nullification as proper and hence as real objects. Only if they failed to contribute to fulfilment would their propriety and claim to reality be falsified. But they contribute to fulfilment in that they lead to the eventual recognition of God as the supreme object, and in that they continue to be required for the promotion of highest fulfilment. Indeed their pursuit is best advanced only through commitment to belief in the primal source of creativity. Their retained connection with the supreme object

upholds their propriety. Hypothetically, were belief in God somehow to bring about the recognition that concern for matter in no way promoted moral fulfilment, then matter would have lost its claim to reality. But in fact belief in God only turns man away from exclusive concern with matter; it actually promotes a fuller appreciation of its functions.

Belief in God is a natural belief. As it arises in spontaneity it too includes the claim of supremacy and reality for its object. But in order to establish that this claim of reality is true it is not enough to show that God is a proper object of the moral sentiment. It is necessary to establish that God is its supreme object. For while the other objects maintain their propriety and their claim to reality by subsumed connection with the supreme object, some object--God, as Emerson decides--must be shown as truly supreme. Emerson apparently establishes this by following the general rule that the test of any object is the power of self-fulfilment resulting from commitment to belief in the object. Since man finds commitment to belief in God most fulfilling--no desire to rejoin the search following--God is the supreme proper object and hence is real.

#### The Credibility of the Twin Claims of the Moral Sentiment

To this point the argument has established that the moral sentiment asserts that God is its supreme object and concomitantly that God exists. But the second major stage of the

argument now presents itself, because a further question remains. What gives these deliverances of the moral sentiment their credibility? The answer rests with the earlier study of the reliability of nature and the procedure of verification which nature provides. The moral sentiment is another designation for the verification procedure. The claim that God exists must be accepted as true because whatever the moral sentiment claims, is true. In turn the general reliability of the moral sentiment rests on the reliability of nature which gives rise to the verification procedure. Belief in the reliability of nature is grounded on the success with which commitment to this belief promotes human living.

We have seen that Emerson holds that whatever the verification procedure (moral sentiment) declares as true is true. His thinking rests on the premise stated early in Nature that "we must trust the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in us, the order of things can satisfy."<sup>18</sup> As we have established earlier, this belief in the reliability of nature rests on the further belief that any other view would make the world chaotic, which if adhered to practically would make continued human existence impossible. The assumption that nature is reliable is supported by the fact man can live. Since his life and his world are not chaotic, nature is reliable.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 3-4.

But as nature impels man to wonder whether he has on hand a trustworthy means to know what is really true or good for him, so nature supplies him with the moral sentiment as that means--the only means. Were a person able to impugn the reliability of the moral sentiment, he at the same time would have shaken belief in the reliability of nature. At this point the limits of the reliability of the moral sentiment are no longer considered objections against its reliability but rather explicable difficulties about its reliability.

Linking his reasoning to the affirmation by the moral sentiment that God exists, we discover that the argument is shaped much like a pyramid of playing cards--if one card falls, the pyramid collapses. If we could show that the moral sentiment lacked reliability when it asserted God's existence, we would also show that the moral sentiment is unreliable in any and all of its revelations. The apparatus for verifying its assertions--the condition of simplicity, the spontaneous arousal of purported intuition, the final pragmatic testing of the alleged intuition--is the same whether in the case of God's existence or any other instance. If after using this apparatus in the former case, the issue were still questionable, then all other cases should remain open for doubt, since the procedure for verifying them is the same for both. Thus disproving the affirmation that God exists, disproves the reliability of the moral sentiment generally. But to disprove that would also be to undo belief in the reliability of nature. And that would be tantamount to

declaring that the world is chaotic, orderless. For reasons we have already given Emerson could not accept this last conclusion, for that would mean that human living is absurd, which continued living shows is not the case. As he says: "Men are all secret believers in it [the goodness of nature]...: they believe that the best is true...or chaos would come."<sup>19</sup>

For the same reason, he insists we must accept the testimony of the moral sentiment that God exists. If its testimony were false we would live in a world of chaos. That, however, would make life an insupportable curse. We find this view expressed as early as 1823.<sup>20</sup> It remained cornerstone of his philosophy his entire life. In 1824, he comments at length on the implications of denying God's existence.

It is casting man back into a cold and comfortless solitude. You leave him alone in a Universe exposed to the convulsions of disorder and the wrecks of systems where man is an atom unable to avert his peril or provide for his escape...Why should he live in this infinite wilderness of suns and stars; he has no security, no interest, no love, in this dire dominion of Chance?<sup>21</sup>

Worth stressing in this passage is that he relates the denial of God's existence to the consequent denial of order in nature, and also loss of order to the loss of man's desire to live. Here it is not obvious that the reason why the denial of God's existence imperils Emerson's belief in the reliability of nature is that

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 283.

<sup>20</sup>JMN, Vol. II, p. 136.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

the denial of God's existence places the reliability of the moral sentiment in doubt; nor is it clear that the crucial test for the acceptance of the orderliness of nature is whether man can actually live better by the one or the other view. These implications emerge later as subsequent texts bear out. We shall cite two.

In 1836, the year he published Nature, he wrote in his journal:

[G]rant us the Ideal Theory, and the universe is solved. Otherwise, the moment a man discovers that he has aims which his faculties cannot answer, the world becomes a riddle. Yet Piety restores him to Health.<sup>22</sup>

Here belief in the orderliness of nature is said to be threatened precisely when the validity of the moral sentiment is shaken. The world becomes a riddle, chaotic, if the moral sentiment sets before man aims which his faculties cannot accept as real, let alone reach. The "Ideal Theory" is that description and account of nature which the moral sentiment sets before us, viz., that nature, and man as part of it, evolves because of the effective presence of the creative spirit, God.

"Yet Piety restores him to Health" cryptically expresses the doctrine that because the moral sentiment is reliable, (in all its revelations, the foremost of which is that God exists) the world is orderly and hence the man who adheres to the promptings of the moral sentiment [Piety] can actually live. To make

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<sup>22</sup> JMN, Vol. V, p. 125.

this clear we must remember that the words "to live" mean to develop in self-fulfilment. Emerson associates living with growing and both of these with being. The opposite associations are dying, decaying, non-being. Following these standard analogies in Emerson, health would belong to the first group. Thus "Piety restores him to Health" means that on the one hand, he who does not live according to the moral sentiment but instead by Understanding would make living impossible; on the other hand he who opts for the moral sentiment, lives.

The man of Understanding might be either a sensist or an idealist, as Emerson's critique of these two philosophical postures reveals. Either tradition if adhered to in practice makes self-fulfilment impossible. The empiricist camp is particularly open to the charge of denying the objectivity of the moral sentiment, and hence of rendering practical living absurd. Both, however, separate man or some aspect of him from nature by declaring unreal some one or another aspect of reality which living affirms as real. Consequently both paralyze man's ability to live and deprive him of "Health." "Piety," i.e., acceptance of the moral sentiment especially in its declaration of God's existence, restores man to "Health."

That is best which gives me to myself....That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen. There is no longer a necessary reason for my being. Already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creep over me and I shall decrease forever.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 132. "That which shows God

His argument, therefore, is that since the moral sentiment claims God for its supreme object, God exists. The reality of the boundless source of creativity is part of the claim. This claim must be believed because all genuine claims of the moral sentiment are true. The general reliability of the moral sentiment is based on the reliability of nature. Nature provides the moral sentiment as a way of ascertaining true beliefs. Nature is reliable because commitment to that belief successfully promotes the quality of human living.

### Conclusion

Once he has established God's existence his search has ended. He could now rest his moral theory on the will of God, since God has been shown to exist. He has also discovered how to solve his original puzzlement regarding the command: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." God is most free, self-determined. The supreme exercise of God's self-determination is in his creativity. Man becomes most like God by becoming free, by self-determination. The supreme exercise of man's self-determination is in his creativity. Man grows by developing nature. Yet the search cannot end. For while it may be settled that man must be self-determined and creative, the paths creativity will take to perfect him, man cannot know beforehand. That depends on his day to day experience.

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out of me."--any approach to God's existence not grounded in the moral sentiment.



The strength and limits of Emerson's approach to God's existence stem mostly from his stern refusal to pursue technical analysis any further than the problems in daily experience seemed to require. The merit of his repose is his thorough-going reliance on the evidence of ordinary experience. Few philosophers have been so tenacious in attempting to respect everything they find in experience, and only what they find there. The limits arise mainly because while he saw the need for technical criticism of the beliefs widely held by the religious, political and business leaders of the new Republic he could have taken more seriously a close technical scrutiny of his own approach. Assured as he was that in each situation nature provides its own appropriate though implicit structures, he was confident that his own approach was therefore validly (though implicitly) structured throughout. "Whatever any mind doth or saith is after a law, and this native law remains over it after it has come to reflection or conscious thought." The spontaneous principle contains the logical, "but virtual and latent."<sup>24</sup>

Emerson's approach to God's existence requires closer technical analysis than he was willing to make--but not because he was remiss for refusing to explicate the logical structure of his approach. It is not an argument or proof in the demonstra-

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<sup>24</sup>"We want in every man a long logic; we cannot pardon the absence of it, but it must not be spoken. Logic is the procession or proportionate unfolding of the intuition; but its virtue is as silent method; the moment it would appear as propositions and have a separate value, it is worthless." Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 327-329.

tive sense. Its force is not demonstrative logical entailment. He cannot be criticized technically for not guaranteeing the links of his approach by a mathematical-type certitude. Indeed the language of mathematical-type necessity and probability is contrary to his view of ordinary experience.

The genuine technical difficulty is that, though he maintained his philosophical beliefs were not merely cultural assumptions but were grounded in lived experience, he did not articulate very clearly why his particular views should not be regarded also as merely cultural assumptions. He believed that to impose cultural assumptions on reality was to prescribe rather than describe, but in places he leaves himself open to that charge.<sup>25</sup>

A case in point--his meaning for the term 'God.' Emerson claims that the true meaning of the term 'God'--as intelligent, unique, possessed of will, etc.--comes to us from the experience of living, within "natural situations" to be precise.<sup>26</sup> By what assurance was that notion of God anything more than a broadly based cultural assumption and not prescriptive? He also suggests that his conception of God would hold true for all future times. Emerson's observation has it that once man relies on this "divine" he is no longer restless. But irreformable

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<sup>25</sup>Prescription would, of course, run counter to Emerson's intention. "If I speak, I define, I confine, and am less....The moment we cease to report and attempt to correct and contrive, it is not truth." *Ibid.*, pp. 329, 342.

<sup>26</sup>Hopkins, Spires of Form, p. 124.

descriptions would appear to be inconsistent with his basic stance. This "finalized" conception of the divine only seems to further the charge of prescription. Although he recognized the impact of cultural assumptions on lived experience, he never remarks on the possibility that his conception of the term 'God' might be such an assumption, and hence might be reformulable at a later day.

The magnitude of the difficulty comes to light when we consider how hard it is to know whether his pragmatic test establishes, is as it seems to be. This problem attends anything the pragmatic test confirms, but especially God's existence. The conclusion that God exists, rests on the supposition that if the moral sentiment--ordinary experience--were to mislead in this special instance, ordinary experience would have to be judged unreliable in any instance. If it were that unreliable then nature itself would not be trustworthy. But then living would be impossible, which is contrary to fact.

Still, on the basis of his own perspective, I believe it is possible--without impugning the reliability of ordinary experience--to project that at some later moment of development some other natural source of creativity might be substituted for what he understood by "God." The issue here is not whether or not ordinary experience misleads, but to what extent it might mislead before it must be rejected as unreliable. Emerson clearly acknowledges the limitations in ordinary experience, and that these limits tend to distortions. But the measure of the

reliability of the moral sentiment is the extent to which commitment to a given thing actually fulfills its promise of a full and satisfying ability to live.

On the one hand, ordinary experience, the moral sentiment, would be unreliable if it convinced the simple man that x-reliance supplied him with his fullest measure of freedom and power when indeed it did not. But on the other hand, if Emerson were mistaken that the moral sentiment had made such a declaration, and if further some other natural source were to supply man with a still larger degree of freedom and power, then the moral sentiment procedure would not have been unreliable, but Emerson's estimate of its actual claims.

His conception of God was intended to rest both on the previous experiential and experimental setting aside of all aspects of lived experience except the spiritual as the source of creativity, and also on the wide-spread belief in God within the community of "young Americans."

Both these bases are open to challenge. The first supposes unidirectional upward movement toward the spiritual in man's awareness and indeed in all nature. Logically, however, and quite in keeping with his evolutionary view, it is possible to project a more nearly circular progression. Thus just as at each previous stage man eventually recognized his dedication to some object was only partially worthy of his commitment, so too man may discover that dedication to the spiritual divinity is a partially correct but passing phase in man's evolution. Matter

(induced chemical stimuli, or embryo reformation, for instance) might again be asserted in place of God as giving man a still fuller measure of creative power consistent with his nature--but matter now that man has gained a heightened appreciation of its capacities.

It is possible to suggest this because he has not provided an account for the necessity of the unidirectional progression of objects of the moral sentiment--from the material to the spiritual. It is also possible because his way of deciding "lasting and full satisfaction," the standard for determining the supremacy of an object, invites it. Since lasting satisfaction is decided factually and since Emerson includes no discussion ever of a timeless norm for what is lasting, there is no way to conclude that commitment to x or y or God will provide lasting satisfaction at some later time. Thus it is possible to claim that what was earlier thought to be spiritual, personal, or whatever, was an exaggeration, that instead the source of creativity is matter, regarded in a way not previously comprehended.

The second base is also open to challenge, largely because Emerson's devoted little study of the concept of community. He holds that community assent (among the "young Americans") has ontological significance but he does not clearly specify the limits of community reliability. It would beg the question to say the community is reliable because those who live naturally are sustained by God. The approach to God's existence is the question at issue. His reliance on the "young Americans" was

rooted in his faith in lived experience, not vice versa. But even the culture of the idealized "young American" would be liable to distortion. He would be the last to deny that. Nonetheless, he never quite specifies the means by which to distinguish what the community mistakenly objectifies in its culture and what he supposes community-experience truly establishes.

One might want to insist, as the later American pragmatists would, that the method employed by the scientific community has the sort of weight Emerson vaguely hoped to find in the community of "young Americans." Reliance on the scientific procedure for truth might seem in basic opposition to Emerson's approach, however. According to his critique, science restricts itself by method to generalizations based on measurement. This represents two problems for a healthy life-style. First, the scientific procedure excludes a priori any feature of lived experience which cannot be gauged mathematically. Secondly, the scientific procedure considers only those particulars of value which can be fit into laws. Those particulars which are not measurable or which may be unique to a concrete situation are regarded as irrelevant.

Indeed the poet or the poet-philosopher<sup>27</sup> rather than the scientist personified what Emerson held to be the approach proper to life. But this poet was his idealization of what a poet

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<sup>27</sup>Plato is the prime example of the poet-philosopher: "Plato affirms the coincidence of science and virtue." Emerson, Works, Vol. IV, p. 83.

should be; the scientist, his typification of the scientist of his day. The poet kept his "inward and outward senses" in balance, i.e., he recognized the richness of actual experience, spirit and matter, unity and diversity, stability and change, the emotive and the intellectual, etc. The creative man, the poet realized that the norms for judging and transforming features in lived experience must come from the experience, and that these norms would require reformulation because experience continually reforms itself. On the other hand, the scientist, still under the sway of the Enlightenment, drew his norms from a mathematical model. He did not yet acknowledge the need to recast his generalizations in light of future cases. Nor was he creative--repetition was the only pattern in a series he could recognize. In short the dimensions of experience tended to be drastically narrowed to what his mathematical ideal for inquiry restricted him--to measurable sense qualities, nothing more. The scientist had lost the delicate balance needed for full human living. Compare the following judgements of "scientific" and poetic experience.

I see not, if one be once caught in this trap of so-called sciences, any escape for the man from the links of the chain of physical necessity. Given such an embryo, such a history must follow. On this platform, one lives in a sty of sensualism, and would soon come to suicide.<sup>28</sup>

But of poetic experience, "...now my chains are broken;...and I shall see and comprehend my relations. That will reconcile me

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Vol. III, p. 54.

to life, and renovate nature."<sup>29</sup> The poet, not the scientist of the day, was best suited to husband the New Eden.

Emerson intended neither to reject nor even to diminish the worth of a genuinely scientific attitude. His quarrel was with the scientific attitude of his day which drew its norms from a mathematical model rather than from lived experience. In his mind, were the scientific approach to draw its norms from lived experience it would be balanced, vital, human, creative. In fact, he worked and hoped for the time when the scientist and the poet would both rely on the same basic procedure, the procedure he attempted to articulate in his "science of the real."<sup>30</sup>

I look for the new Teacher that...shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought, the Deity, is one thing with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy.<sup>31</sup>

Properly understood it might be consistent with Emerson's thought to accept the suggestion that the ideal community for support of belief would be that of science, though not the scientific community of his day. He thought the natural way of thinking was the genuinely scientific way of thinking. His community of like-minded believers would in this sense be a scientific community--though, of course, not necessarily a community of scientists. It would be proper to say that for him the conclusion

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Ibid., pp. 12, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, p. 151; Vol. III, pp. 12, 20-21. "For the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 10.



"God exists," rests on the scientific approach to human living, and that he sought support for this conclusion from among men who also shared his scientific approach.

Regardless of the limits of his argument for God's existence, his work as a whole anticipated the efforts of later pragmatists to develop fully a procedure in harmony with both humanism and science. Whether or not his conception of God was entirely rooted in experience, Emerson himself did not regard his over-all efforts as final.<sup>32</sup> In fact, he was not certain what the final resolution would be. In his old age, nearly twenty years after the first impact of Darwin's Origin of Species, Emerson commented on the rise in attention to science and the decline of interest in poetry, with the remark that our heightened interest in the sciences will either beget a new and better poetry, or extinguish it completely.<sup>33</sup> Between the lines runs his completed thought: The future Eden would be either one of greater life--of more humanly meaningful freedom and creativity--or one of mass suicide.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 369; Vol. III, pp. 14-15, 21.

<sup>33</sup>Williams, "Unpublished Letters of Emerson," pp. 477-478.

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date

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Signature of Adviser